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Plato's Cratylus

Proceedings of the Eleventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense

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Preface – Making Sense of the *Cratylus*

This volume is a collection of papers originally presented at the *Eleventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, held in Prague in November 9th and 10th, 2017.

Some dialogues in the corpus of Plato's works have a straightforward importance, position and overall role. The *Cratylus* is not one of them. In this dialogue Plato touches on questions of longstanding importance to him – as we can conclude from other dialogues – and raises new questions which, given the space dedicated to them, should be worth asking when one is dealing with "correctness of names". And yet there has been wide disagreement about the dialogue's meaning. It contains queries about speech and its parts, about things having their own natures *versus* consisting in mere appearances, about general flux *versus* the good and beautiful remaining always the same. There are examinations of semantics and of Forms behind names, and a famously lengthy exploration of etymology. Although for some of these questions we see where Plato's leaning is, we cannot be sure about his views of almost anything that is explicitly stated. And scholars indeed differ so much in saying what Plato's opinions are in this dialogue that it is almost without parallel in the whole corpus. Is Plato conventionalist or rather non-conventionalist in what concerns names? Is he giving any genuine answer to the initial question of the correctness of names? Are his etymologies to be taken seriously? Is he entirely sceptical about words and language as means to achieve knowledge or does he rather make distinctions with a purpose to show the way forward? Is the dialogue aporetical in its nature or does it convey some positive message we should retain? These are the main questions which have been raised. Most of them have not only received different answers from different scholars – which would not be exceptional – but to an unusual extent these answers are directly opposite. This controversial status of the dialogue has not escaped anyone's attention. It is therefore not surprising that there is something like a golden thread that can be observed going through many different interpretations. Very often interpreters have not taken their task to be to merely explain this or that particular theory or problem of the *Cratylus*, but to make sense of the dialogue as a whole, to defend its overall meaning, or to propose the way it should be understood in the collection of other dialogues, even in cases when they seek to interpret only a part of the text. We can observe this with a higher than usual frequency in the interpretations adopting an approach which can be seen as the most traditional, offering a closer scrutiny of chosen passage or passages. Very often the question of what makes the *Cratylus* worth reading is

recognizable in the background. But there are also other approaches which are more directly related to its puzzling nature like larger summarising overviews of its arguments and different attempts to show how the dialogue appears in the context – the context of Plato's other dialogues, of ancient thought more generally or, last but not least, of distinctions made by modern semantics and philosophy of language.

All the aforementioned approaches are represented in the present volume. This may be taken as one of the features making it a worthy contribution to the debate. In relatively little space, it displays the controversial standing of the dialogue by exemplifying the variety of interpretations and approaches it allows for – and yet it does this without falling into repetition or stalemate. The texts offered here either propose new points of view or build upon preceding literature to make further steps in directions which have already been advocated. On the whole the volume proves that the *Cratylus* is an inevitable starting point for anyone who wants to learn about Plato's views on speech – *logos* – and the ontology related to it. It also makes clearer that it is a very complex dialogue that does not offer straightforward answers but necessitates a careful reading and evaluation of individual arguments against other arguments. This is an important achievement in that it shows a general way to approach a highly literary author whose style of thought and expression is everything but simple. Moreover, the *Cratylus* is probably the dialogue most resistant to the simplifying *either/or* kind of interpretation, as this volume makes sufficiently plain. For all these reasons, this collection of papers is readable as a single book from beginning to end. It might be also of some interest that it is the first collective monograph on this dialogue.

The volume starts with *Steffen Lund Jørgensen*'s contribution advocating a new way to look at Socrates' interlocutor Hermogenes as a means to better understand certain puzzling claims of the first part of the dialogue. It is followed by *Francesco Ademollo*'s paper in which the author of the only modern commentary on the dialogue expands his views and provides a helpful comparison with modern semantics of Kripke, Russel and Frege, thereby giving a fine example of the context-widening interpretation as mentioned above. A not-dissimilar approach – taking an overview of central passages against a background of modern notions of referentiality and intentionality – is offered by *Francesco Aronadio*. In the same vein, the author of this introduction offers summary of the first part of the dialogue in order to make a case that even without bringing in modern concepts we can distinguish here a valuable insight into the nature of language. The paper by *Anna Pavani* is then a natural follow-up, defending the view that a key conceptual distinction is made in one of the arguments of the first part, namely the argument of the Forms of names.

The paper by *Jakub Jinek* revisits a much debated etymological part of the dialogue, in particular the etymologies of divine names, offering a new look at the combination of metaphysics and irony implied in them. Starting from Socrates' etymological analysis of Hermogenes' name, the paper by *Olof Pettersson* leads us to the second part of the dialogue and towards its conclusion about the relation of names and knowledge of things behind names, where the author sees a thoroughly sceptical stance on this point on Plato's part.

The three following papers have in common the emphasis on the wider contextualisation which is necessary, according to them, for the correct understanding of the dialogue. Thus *Mariapaola Bergomi* gives a very new impulse by arguing that Gorgias, though not mentioned in the dialogue, is present behind, and targeted by, some of its central arguments. *Frédérique Ildefonse* then proceeds in the previously suggested but insufficiently explored direction of reading the dialogue in connection with later dialogues, like the *Sophist*, and later philosophers, the Stoics, in her case. *Filip Karfík* makes yet further important steps on this ground, advancing arguments for a sceptical reading of the *Cratylus*, advocated already by Pettersson, in which the dialogue mainly shows impossibilities and is therefore Plato's preparation for the *Sophist* and the claims made there about different relations between language and reality.

Vladimír Mikeš
Luddendenfoot, 2020

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Tables

CHAPTER 1

The Opening of Plato's *Cratylus*

A Prelude to a Socratic Reading of the Dialogue

Steffen Lund Jørgensen

Abstract

The paper argues that the opening of the *Cratylus* is a prelude to a Socratic reading of the dialogue. The paper has two main sections. The first section argues that the opening of the *Cratylus* characterizes Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher and thereby introduces the reader to a Socratic reading of the dialogue. Specifically, the section argues that the opening portrays Hermogenes as modelling himself on Socrates by using two conversational devices that are characteristically Socratic: Socratic questioning and Socratic irony. In addition, the paper argues that Hermogenes displays a Socratic attitude to knowledge and inquiry. The second section argues that a Socratic reading of the dialogue significantly improves our understanding of the Socratic nature of the *conversation* between Socrates and Hermogenes as well as the Socratic nature of the *theory* they develop. Specifically, the paper argues that the general assumption of a Socratic conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes best explains the significance of the invalidity of Socrates' argument about the nature of things and actions (386d8–e9). In addition, the paper argues that the general assumption of the Socratic nature of the theory developed by Socrates and Hermogenes best illuminates Socrates' account of the expert name-maker as a *nomothetes* (388d6–389a4).

Keywords

opening of the *Cratylus* – Socratic – Hermogenes – questioning – irony – conversation – theory of the *nomothetes*

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1 Introduction[1]

This paper focuses on the opening of the *Cratylus* (383a–384e) and the significance of this opening for our understanding of the *Cratylus* as a whole. The subtitle – 'A prelude to a Socratic reading of the dialogue' – indicates the main point of the paper: that the opening of the *Cratylus* is a prelude to a Socratic reading of the dialogue. The paper has two main sections. The first section argues that the opening of the *Cratylus* characterizes Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher and thereby introduces the reader to a Socratic reading of the dialogue. The second section argues that a Socratic reading of the dialogue significantly improves our understanding of the Socratic nature of the conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes as well as the Socratic nature of the theory they develop. Importantly, the paper takes the position that Socratic ideas are those ideas that Socrates in Plato's dialogues puts forward for serious consideration and appears willing to defend, and that Socratic behaviour is behaviour that Socrates in Plato's dialogues typically displays. Thus, the paper makes no distinction between a historical Socrates and a Platonic Socrates in Plato's dialogues. Finally, the arguments made in this paper have a bearing on the interpretation of the third part of the dialogue and the scholarly discussion about the outcome of the dialogue. The conclusion briefly indicates how a Socratic reading of the *Cratylus* supports the claim that Socrates throughout the dialogue maintains the view that there is a natural correctness of names.

2 The Opening of Plato's *Cratylus* (383a–384e)

An interpreter of the opening of the *Cratylus* might decide to focus on the very first words of the dialogue, i.e. the opening exchange between Hermogenes and Cratylus (383a1–3):

ΕΡΜ. Βούλει οὖν καὶ Σωκράτει τῷδε ἀνακοινωσώμεθα τὸν λόγον;
ΚΡ. Εἴ σοι δοκεῖ.

1 The paper develops ideas and arguments already expressed in brief, scattered and preliminary form in my PhD thesis (Steffen Lund Jørgensen, *Appearance and Reality. Socrates' aims and strategies in Plato's* Cratylus, University of Copenhagen, 2015). I presented an earlier version of this paper in Paris (at the International Workshop of the *Société d'Études Platoniciennes*, 2016). I would like to thank the audiences in Paris and in Prague for their criticisms and suggestions for improvement. Special thanks to Vladimír Mikeš, the editor of the volume, and Michael Russo, the proof-reader of the volume, for many careful observations. Finally, I would like to thank Lesley Brown, Christopher Pelling, and Malcolm Schofield for commenting on different versions of the paper.

HERM. Do you then want us to share our discussion with Socrates here as well?

CRAT. If you think so.

While these words between Hermogenes and Cratylus may seem casual and innocuous, some scholars have construed them as a kind of image of the philosophical content of the *Cratylus*. In his valedictory lecture "First words", Myles Burnyeat examined the first words of many Platonic dialogues, including those of the *Cratylus*.[2] In the case of the *Cratylus*, Burnyeat approvingly cites an interpretation offered by Robert Wardy. According to Burnyeat and Wardy, the first words of the *Cratylus* thematise language and the conditions of meaningful communication.[3]

I mention this interpretation here in order to contrast its underlying approach to the opening of the *Cratylus* with the approach adopted in this paper. One difference between the two approaches is that Burnyeat focuses on the first few words while this paper focuses on the opening as a whole (which in the case of the *Cratylus* comprises the first two Stephanus pages). Another difference is that Burnyeat treats the first lines as an image or reflection of the philosophical content of the dialogue while this paper considers the first few pages as a prelude or introduction to a certain way of reading the dialogue. A third difference is that Burnyeat regards the deeper meaning of the first lines as discoverable only upon reflection on the philosophical content of the dialogue while this paper regards the significance of the first few pages of the *Cratylus* as salient to an attentive first-time reader. Though these are important differences, and though I disagree with Burnyeat and Wardy's specific interpretation of the first lines of the *Cratylus*, the two approaches do not exclude each other. In fact, they can supplement each other, and I shall offer an attempt to combine the two approaches in the conclusion of this paper.

2.1 *Hermogenes as a Sharp and Experienced Philosopher*

First, let us consider Hermogenes' description of Cratylus' position (383a4–b2):

ΕΡΜ. Κρατύλος φησὶν ὅδε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα εἶναι ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων φύσει πεφυκυῖαν, καὶ οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ ἄν τινες συνθέμενοι καλεῖν καλῶσι, τῆς αὑτῶν φωνῆς μόριον ἐπιφθεγγόμενοι,

2 Myles Burnyeat, "First words: a valedictory lecture," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 43 (1998).

3 Burnyeat, "First Words," 317.

ἀλλὰ ὀρθότητά τινα τῶν ὀνομάτων πεφυκέναι καὶ Ἕλλησι καὶ βαρβάροις τὴν αὐτὴν ἅπασιν.

HERM. Socrates, Cratylus here claims (i) that each of the beings has a correctness of name which is constituted by nature, and (ii) that a name is not what some people may call something upon having agreed to call it that, uttering a part of their own voice, but (iii) there is a correctness of names by nature for both Greeks and barbarians, the same for all.

Traditionally, interpreters of the *Cratylus* have treated Hermogenes as an intellectually weak person.[4] More recently, Rachel Barney and David Sedley have sought to rehabilitate Hermogenes by characterizing him as the voice of common sense in the dialogue and as someone who, though lacking in theoretical sophistication, is a quite capable and serious interlocutor.[5] Going further than this, the present paper argues that he is a sharp and experienced philosopher. Four aspects of Hermogenes' account of Cratylus' position support this interpretation of Hermogenes.

First, Hermogenes makes competent use of a range of intellectual and technical (or quasi-technical) expressions, e.g. 'a correctness of name' (ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα), 'each of the beings' (ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων), 'constituted by nature' (φύσει πεφυκυῖαν), 'uttering a part of their own voice' (τῆς αὑτῶν φωνῆς μόριον ἐπιφθεγγόμενοι). Second, in the passage quoted above, Hermogenes succinctly ascribes three precise claims to Cratylus. Of course, Hermogenes might simply be repeating Cratylus' claims word for word, but to me Hermogenes' description reads like his own way of summarizing Cratylus' position (in particular the second claim which appears to be a denial of a claim made by Hermogenes). Further, even if Hermogenes repeats Cratylus' words, the selection of these three dense and precise claims as representative of Cratylus' position indicate philosophical experience and understanding on Hermogenes' part.

Third, Hermogenes ascribes claims to Cratylus about the correctness of names (383a4–5: ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα εἶναι [...]; 383a7–b2: ὀρθότητά τινα τῶν

4 E.g. Norman Kretzmann, "Plato on the Correctness of Names," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8, 2 (1971): 127–128; Charles Kahn, "Language and Ontology in the *Cratylus*," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, ed. Edward Lee, Alexander Mourelatos, Richard Rorty (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), 158–159.

5 Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 23–24, 40; David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51–3.

ὀνομάτων […]) and about what is not a name (383a5–7: οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ […]). One may evaluate quite differently the fact that Hermogenes passes from talking about the correctness of names to talking about what names are (and *vice versa*) without explicitly mentioning that he is passing from one issue to another. If one denies the presence of the distinction between correctness of names and namehood in the dialogue, as for instance Francesco Ademollo does,[6] one might take Hermogenes here as talking loosely about namehood and correctness without making any distinction between the two. If one accepts the presence of the distinction between correctness and namehood in the dialogue, as most scholars seem to do, one might take the fact that Hermogenes does not explicitly mark the difference between the two issues as evidence that Hermogenes is confused and conflates the two. In my view, however, we best explain the fact that Hermogenes and the other interlocutors pass from talking about correctness to talking about namehood without explicitly mentioning this by assuming that the interlocutors take for granted that there is an important difference between being a correct name of something and being a name of that thing.[7] Thus, Hermogenes' ascription of claims about correctness and claims about namehood to Cratylus indicates that Hermogenes is familiar with the distinction between being a name of something (namehood) and being a correct name of that thing (correctness of names).

Fourth, the fact that Hermogenes describes Cratylus as denying the view that names are *synthemata*, i.e. agreements (383a5–7: οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ […]) indicates that Hermogenes understands the idiosyncrasy of Cratylus' position – that Cratylus' idiosyncratic view that all names are completely correct names leads him to deny the view that names can be *synthemata*. As I read the dialogue, the interlocutors agree that one may hold that there is a natural correctness of names while holding that names can be *synthemata*. At the same time, the interlocutors agree that if one holds that there is a natural correctness of names, one is committed to holding that the best kind of names are *homoiomata* (i.e. likenesses of things) while the inferior kind of names are *synthemata*. The inferiority of the names that are *synthemata* entails that these names fall short of complete correctness. Now, since Cratylus holds that all names are completely correct names (429b10–11), we can see why Cratylus denies that names can be *synthemata*. If Cratylus granted that names could be *synthemata*, he would thereby be denying his deeply held view that all names

6 Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato. A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2–4.

7 I defend this line of interpretation in Steffen Lund Jørgensen, "The notion of a correctness of names in Plato's *Cratylus*. Arguments for a basic distinction," *Methodos* [Online] 19 (2019).

are completely correct. Cratylus is likely to have the same reason for denying the conception of names as *synthemata* in his initial position and in the third part of the dialogue. While Hermogenes' initial account of Cratylus' position does not explain Cratylus' reasons for denying the conception of names as *synthemata*, Hermogenes does highlight an important and idiosyncratic part of Cratylus' position, and this choice of focus leads me to assume that Hermogenes understands Cratylus' special reasons for holding this idiosyncratic view.[8] For this reason and the reasons stated above, I consider Hermogenes' initial account of Cratylus' position as evidence for regarding Hermogenes as a sharp and experienced philosopher.

2.2 *Hermogenes as a Socratic Philosopher: Socratic Questioning*

ΕΡΜ. […] ἐρωτῶ οὖν αὐτὸν ἐγὼ εἰ αὐτῷ Κρατύλος τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ὄνομα· ὁ δὲ ὁμολογεῖ. "Τί δὲ Σωκράτει;" ἔφην. "Σωκράτης," ἦ δ' ὅς. "Οὐκοῦν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις πᾶσιν, ὅπερ καλοῦμεν ὄνομα ἕκαστον, τοῦτό

8 One might object that I am hereby taking the theoretical apparatus that the interlocutors develop during the dialogue and reading it back into Hermogenes' initial description of Cratylus' position. In a way, this is true, but two main reasons justify this approach. First, while the *Cratylus* is the earliest comprehensive evidence of theoretical discussions of the correctness of names in the ancient Greek tradition, the fiction of the dialogue makes clear that the discussion between Socrates, Hermogenes and Cratylus concerns a well-known topic. This is particularly clear from Hermogenes' remark that he has discussed this topic many times before both with Cratylus and many others (384c10–d2), but Socrates' comments on Prodicus' lectures (384b2–c1) and Cratylus' statement about his own studies and his willingness to take students (428b6–c1) point in the same direction. Second, much of the central theoretical terminology is already present in Hermogenes' initial account of Cratylus' position. Admittedly, Hermogenes' account does not mention the conception of names as *homoiomata*. However, Hermogenes' account does mention the conception of names as *synthemata*, and the account ascribes a denial of this conception to Cratylus. The account thereby implies that Cratylus has an alternative conception of names. What this conception is, we cannot be sure, but we should note that, in the third part of the dialogue, Cratylus enthusiastically confirms his endorsement of the conception of names as *homoiomata* or *mimemata* (throughout the *Cratylus*, the interlocutors apparently use *homoioma* and *mimema* as synonyms). See 430a12–b2: Socrates: "Do you also agree that a name is an imitation of a thing?" Cratylus: "Most certainly." (ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα ὁμολογεῖς μίμημά τι εἶναι τοῦ πράγματος; ΚΡ. Πάντων μάλιστα.); 434a1–2: Cratylus: "It makes all the difference, Socrates, that one shows whatever one shows with a likeness and not with something random." (ΚΡ. Ὅλῳ καὶ παντὶ διαφέρει, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ ὁμοιώματι δηλοῦν ὅτι ἄν τις δηλοῖ ἀλλὰ μὴ τῷ ἐπιτυχόντι.). Thus, it is at least possible, and perhaps even likely, that Cratylus already had this conception of names before Socrates and Hermogenes began their common inquiry. However, even if Cratylus did not hold the conception of names as *homoiomata* from the beginning of the dialogue, he most likely had some alternative conception of names.

ἐστιν ἑκάστῳ ὄνομα;" ὁ δέ, "Οὔκουν σοί γε," ἦ δ' ὅς, "ὄνομα Ἑρμογένης, οὐδὲ ἂν πάντες καλῶσιν ἄνθρωποι."

HERM. […] So I ask him if his name is 'Cratylus' in reality. He says it is. "What is Socrates' name?" I asked. "'Socrates'," he said. "Does that also hold for all other people – that each person has the name that we call him?" "No, not in your case," he said, "'Hermogenes' isn't your name, not even if all people call you that." (383b2–7)

Interpreters of the *Cratylus* usually note that, according to Plato's *Phaedo* (59b) and several writings by Xenophon, the historical Hermogenes was a friend and a follower of Socrates.[9] However, scholars have made little use of this piece of information in their interpretation of Hermogenes in the *Cratylus* and in their interpretation of the dialogue as a whole.[10] Now, I regard the opening of the *Cratylus* as a way of introducing the reader to a Socratic reading of the dialogue, and I hold that the opening mainly achieves this effect by reminding the reader of Hermogenes' identity as a follower of Socrates and an aspiring Socratic philosopher.

The first lines of the dialogue having this function are those quoted above from Hermogenes' opening statement. In these lines, Hermogenes reports his attempt to question Cratylus. The target of Hermogenes' questioning seems to be Cratylus' claim that a name is not what some people may call something upon having agreed to call it that (see 383a5–7). Hermogenes seems to target this claim by seeking to have Cratylus concede that all humans have the names we call them. In other words, Hermogenes seems to want to bring himself into a position to ask Cratylus how he can claim that a name is not what some people may call something upon having agreed to call it that, given his concession that all humans have the names we call them.

To achieve this purpose, Hermogenes uses Socratic induction in the context of Socratic questioning. First, Hermogenes asks Cratylus if his name is really 'Cratylus' and Cratylus agrees that it is. Then, Hermogenes asks the same question about Socrates, and Cratylus agrees. Finally, Hermogenes asks Cratylus to confirm the general conclusion that all people really have the names other

9 E.g. Ademollo, *Commentary*, 18–19; Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 3.

10 Two exceptions are Ademollo's interpretations of Hermogenes as familiar with the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge (at 386a–c) and the theory of forms (at 389a ff). Ademollo, *Commentary*, 81–82.

people call them. This method of argument combining induction and questioning is what we today call Socratic questioning, because Plato's Socrates makes frequent and effective use of this method of argument, and because the use of this method of argument is characteristic of Socrates. Thus, my claim is that Hermogenes is here modelling himself on Socrates by using one conversational device that is characteristically Socratic, namely Socratic questioning. The lines remind the reader that Hermogenes is a Socratic philosopher and prepare the attentive reader to look for other indications that the characterization of Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher is an important part of the opening and the dialogue as a whole.

In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle famously attributes to Socrates the use of *epagogic* arguments.[11] Socratic *epagoge* and its relation to Socratic argumentation is a large and complex field of study.[12] For present purposes, this paper will restrict itself to making two claims about Socratic *epagoge* in the context of Socratic argumentation, as it appears in Plato's dialogues. The first claim is that one kind of Socratic *epagoge* is what we might call enumerative inductive generalization. By 'enumerative inductive generalization' is meant a kind of ampliative reasoning which sets out a non-exhaustive number of observed cases as premises and leads to a general conclusion about all cases involving the relevant kinds of objects and properties present in the observed cases. The simplest way of formulating this kind of inductive inference is 'Some A's are B, so all A's are B'.[13]

11 XIII 4, 1078b27–30: "For there are two things one may rightly attribute to Socrates: *epagogic* arguments and defining things generally; for they are both concerned with the starting point of knowledge." (δύο γάρ ἐστιν ἅ τις ἂν ἀποδοίη Σωκράτει δικαίως, τούς τ᾽ ἐπακτικοὺς λόγους καὶ τὸ ὁρίζεσθαι καθόλου· ταῦτα γάρ ἐστιν ἄμφω περὶ ἀρχὴν ἐπιστήμης.)

12 Recent studies include Hayden W. Ausland, "Socratic induction in Plato and Aristotle," in *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*, ed. Jakob Leth Fink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Mark L. McPherran, "Socratic Epagoge and Socratic Induction," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, 3 (2007) and Mark L. McPherran, "Santas, Socrates, and Induction," *Philosophical Inquiry* 31, 1–2 (2009). Earlier remarks on the subject include Gerasimos Santas, *Socrates*: *philosophy in Plato's early dialogues* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 138–55 and Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 267–9.

13 This is the classical kind of induction. For a brief survey of inductive generalization (including enumerative inductive generalization) as well as hypothetical induction and probabilistic induction, see John Norton, "A Little Survey of Induction," in *Scientific Evidence: Philosophical Theories and Applications*, ed. Peter Achinstein (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and John Norton, "A Survey of Inductive Generalization," (on-line: https://www.pitt.edu/~jdnorton/papers/Survey_ind_gen.pdf), 2010.

The second claim is that one kind of argumentative context in which this kind of Socratic *epagoge* is used is the context of what we might call Socratic questioning. By 'Socratic questioning' is meant a method of asking critical questions relevant to a philosophical position (or a particular understanding of a philosophical position) with the aim of clarifying, exploring, and – at least provisionally – accepting or rejecting the philosophical position (or the particular understanding of the philosophical position). This description is intended to cover Socrates' use of questions in all of Plato's dialogues and not merely Socrates' use of questions in Plato's supposedly early dialogues. In other words, this paper takes Socrates' use of questions in Plato's dialogues to be uniform in aim and method.

Let me offer one example of this kind of Socratic *epagoge* as it appears in the context of Socratic questioning. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates undertakes to question Polus' claim that good political orators are the most powerful people in cities.[14] Socrates contradicts Polus' claim by stating that political orators (and tyrants) are the least powerful people, since they can do nothing of what they want, but only whatever *seems* to them to be best.[15] As a step towards establishing this conclusion, Socrates proposes to distinguish between the things one does for the sake of something and that for the sake of which one does these things (467c5–e1).

In this passage Socrates asks Polus whether people who take drugs prescribed by the doctor *want* to do what they are doing – taking the drug and being in pain – or if they want to be healthy, which is that for the sake of which they take the drug in the first place. Polus takes the latter option. Socrates then proceeds to ask similar questions about sailors and other businessmen, and Polus confirms that what sailors want is not sailing, but the thing for the sake of which they sail, which is wealth. Finally, Socrates asks Polus to confirm the general conclusion that if someone does something for the sake of something, this person does not want what he is doing, but rather the thing for the sake of which he acts. Polus agrees.

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14 See 466b4–5 where Polus asks: "Are they not the most powerful in cities?" ([…] οὐ μέγιστον δύνανται ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν;).

15 466d6–e2: "[…] I claim, Polus, that both political orators and tyrants are the least powerful in cities, as I mentioned a moment ago; for they do nothing of what they want, in a manner of speaking, but they do whatever seems to them to be best." ([…] φημὶ γάρ, ὦ Πῶλε, ἐγὼ καὶ τοὺς ῥήτορας καὶ τοὺς τυράννους δύνασθαι μὲν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν σμικρότατον, ὥσπερ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον· οὐδὲν γὰρ ποιεῖν ὧν βούλονται ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ποιεῖν μέντοι ὅτι ἂν αὐτοῖς δόξῃ βέλτιστον εἶναι.)

This kind of Socratic *epagoge* in the context of Socratic questioning is exactly what we see in Hermogenes' reported questioning of Cratylus (383b2–7). First, Hermogenes asks Cratylus if his name is really Cratylus, and Cratylus agrees that it is. Then, Hermogenes asks the same question about Socrates, and Cratylus agrees. Finally, Hermogenes asks Cratylus to confirm the general conclusion that all people really have the names other people call them. Just like Socrates in the *Gorgias*, Hermogenes employs a method of asking critical questions relevant to a philosophical position – the position that names are not *synthemata* – with the aim of clarifying, exploring, and, in this case, rejecting the philosophical position. Just like Socrates in the *Gorgias*, Hermogenes does this by using an inductive kind of reasoning that sets out a non-exhaustive number of observed cases as premises and leads to a general conclusion about all cases.

Unlike Socrates in the *Gorgias*, however, Hermogenes fails in his attempt, when Cratylus denies the general conclusion with the claim that Hermogenes does not really have the name 'Hermogenes', even if all people call him that. In this respect as well as in others, Hermogenes is like another Socratic philosopher in Plato's dialogues, namely Chaerephon in the *Gorgias*. At the beginning of the *Gorgias* (447b9–449a10) Socrates encourages Chaerephon to ask Gorgias what kind of expert Gorgias takes himself to be. Instead, Chaerephon ends up questioning Polus. Ultimately, Chaerephon's attempt to question Polus fails, just as Hermogenes' attempt to question to Cratylus fails. My claim is not that the two passages are exactly similar, or that Hermogenes and Chaerephon are identical characters. The important point is that Chaerephon's questioning of Polus and Hermogenes' questioning of Cratylus are scenes of the same type. Both scenes show us Socratic philosophers who model themselves on Socrates' way of questioning others, and both scenes illustrate the difficulty of pursuing Socratic questioning, especially when dealing with interlocutors who are not inclined to do philosophy in the Socratic spirit.

2.3 *Hermogenes as a Socratic Philosopher: Socratic Irony*

ΕΡΜ. [...] καὶ ἐμοῦ ἐρωτῶντος καὶ προθυμουμένου εἰδέναι ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, οὔτε ἀποσαφεῖ οὐδὲν εἰρωνεύεταί τε πρός με, προσποιούμενός τι αὐτὸς ἐν ἑαυτῷ διανοεῖσθαι ὡς εἰδὼς περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὃ εἰ βούλοιτο σαφῶς εἰπεῖν, ποιήσειεν ἂν καὶ ἐμὲ ὁμολογεῖν καὶ λέγειν ἅπερ αὐτὸς λέγει. εἰ οὖν πῃ ἔχεις συμβαλεῖν τὴν Κρατύλου μαντείαν, ἡδέως ἂν ἀκούσαιμι· μᾶλλον δὲ αὐτῷ σοι ὅπῃ δοκεῖ ἔχειν περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος ἔτι ἂν ἥδιον πυθοίμην, εἴ σοι βουλομένῳ ἐστίν.

HERM. […] And while I ask him questions and am eager to know what he means, he doesn't clarify anything but is evasive towards me,[16] claiming that he is thinking something to himself as someone who has knowledge on the topic which – if he wanted to speak clearly – would make me agree and make the very claims he makes. So if you can somehow interpret Cratylus' oracular message, I would be pleased to hear it. But I would be even more pleased to hear what you yourself think about the correctness of names, if that's something you want. (383b7–384a7)

Hermogenes describes Cratylus as someone who possesses knowledge about the correctness of names and can compel his interlocutor to agree with him if only he chooses to express himself clearly. This, I shall argue, is an instance of Socratic irony. The irony consists in the fact that Hermogenes expresses his meaning – that Cratylus is not a wise person or teacher – by using language that characterizes Cratylus as a wise person and teacher. Plato's Socrates often uses this kind of Socratic irony. One example comes from the opening of the *Cratylus* itself. This is Socrates' description of Prodicus' fifty-drachma lecture in his response to Hermogenes (384a8–384c9). In both passages, Hermogenes and

16 I translate *eironeuetai* with 'is evasive' and not with 'is being ironic'. This reflects my general view that the words *eironeia*, *eironeuomai*, *eiron*, etc., when used in Plato's dialogues, mainly involve evasiveness and not irony. That is, I take Hermogenes to be describing Cratylus, not as being ironic, but as being evasive. More generally, I agree with scholars such as Iakovos Vasiliou and Melissa Lane in not translating *eironeia* in Plato with 'irony'. Iakovos Vasiliou, "Conditional irony in the Socratic dialogues," *The Classical Quarterly* 49, 2 (1999): 465–8; Melissa Lane, "The Evolution of *eirōneia* in Classical Greek Texts: Why Socratic *eirōneia* is Not Socratic Irony," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006). However, while Lane regards the core meaning of *eironeuesthai* as 'conceal by feigning' (and as a kind of deceit), I hold that the core meaning involves evasiveness and is not necessarily any kind of deceit. Thus, while Lane regards Hermogenes as describing Cratylus as being deceitful in the present passage (i.e. as feigning that he has knock-down proof for his own theory and thereby concealing that he may not have such knock-down proof), I regard Hermogenes as describing Cratylus as being evasive and as claiming that he has knock-down proof for his theory which he could present. How do we interpret the connection between Hermogenes' ascription of evasiveness to Cratylus and Hermogenes' description of Cratylus as claiming that he has knock-down proof which he could present? My own impression is that Hermogenes offers the description of Cratylus as a justification for his claim that Cratylus is being evasive. Thus, in saying that Cratylus *eironeuetai*, Hermogenes is not criticizing Cratylus for trying to deceive him but for evading the difficult questions. For Lane's interpretation of the present passage, see "The Evolution," 56–57.

Socrates use a kind of irony directed against a small group of people who are exceedingly conceited, overconfident, and pompous – people like Protagoras, Euthyphro, Prodicus – and Cratylus. Thus, my claim is that Hermogenes – in his response to Cratylus – is modelling himself on Socrates by using one conversational device that is characteristically Socratic, namely Socratic irony. The lines confirm the impression that the opening characterizes Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher, and that this characterization is an important part of the opening and the dialogue as a whole.

The study of Socratic irony is a complex and rather heterogeneous field of research.[17] For present purposes, this paper will restrict itself to making two claims about Socratic irony, as it appears in Plato's dialogues. The first claim is that one kind of Socratic irony is about people other than the person being ironic. Who are these people? It seems uncontroversial to claim that examples of these people in Plato include Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*, Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, Protagoras in the *Protagoras*, and Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias in the *Apology*. The relevant features common to these people include the following. They all claim to have expert knowledge of something valuable and to be able to teach it to others; all are considered by Socrates to lack this knowledge and the capacity to teach; and they are all considered by Socrates to be conceited, overconfident, and pompous with regard to their level of knowledge and their capacity as teachers. The kind of Socratic irony I want to focus on is the kind of Socratic irony that is about this very small group of people who have these exceptional deficiencies and character flaws, as they appear from a Socratic point of view.[18]

17 Studies on Socratic irony include Gregory Vlastos, "Socratic Irony," *The Classical Quarterly*, 37, 1 (1987); Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Giovanni Ferrari, "Socratic Irony as Pretence," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 34 (2008); Melissa Lane, "Reconsidering Socratic Irony," in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed. D. R. Morrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jonathan Lear, *A Case for Irony*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), Iakovos Vasiliou, "Socratic irony," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*, ed. John Bussanich and Nicholas D. Smith (New York, London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

18 In some cases Socrates appears to be quite certain that some people, e.g. Prodicus, do not have the knowledge that they portray themselves as having. In these cases, Socrates behaves – and uses ironic behavior – on the assumption that the other person has the typical above-mentioned character flaws. In other cases, Socrates may be less certain about the person's character and level of knowledge and may approach the person with a mixture of irony and genuine curiosity about what Socrates might learn from engaging with this person.

The second claim is that the kind of Socratic irony directed against these people generally takes the form of caricature. When the user of Socratic irony faces one or more of these people, or is led to think of them, the user of Socratic irony may respond to this situation by presenting himself as one of the admirers of their wisdom and capacity as teachers. In doing so, the Socratic person *imitates* the situation in which one of the men hoping to gain wisdom (and political success) approaches one of the men claiming to have this wisdom and to be able to teach it. That is, the Socratic person brings about an imitation of the situation as a whole, either by characterizing the behaviour of the other person (if he is absent) or by inviting him to behave as the stereotypical person claiming to have wisdom and the capacity to teach this wisdom. From the point of view of the Socratic person, this imitation is caricature, because the targeted person does not have wisdom or the capacity to teach this wisdom. In addition, the other person's behaviour is a sort of unintentional self-caricature. By behaving as the person who has wisdom while being far from having this wisdom, the other person mocks his own exceptional character flaws.

An example of this kind of Socratic irony appears in Socrates' response to Hermogenes in the opening of the *Cratylus* (384a8–384c9). In this passage, Socrates creates a caricature by imitating the type of situation in which Prodicus thinks he naturally belongs. This situation is one where an admirer of Prodicus speaks of his fifty-drachma lecture as if listening to this lecture will make the person educated on the subject and enable the person to teach other people the truth about the correctness of names. The irony consists in the fact that Socrates expresses his meaning – that Prodicus is not a wise person or teacher – by using language that characterizes Prodicus as a wise person and teacher.

Socrates makes clear that he is engaging in caricature, partly by exaggerating Prodicus' description of his lecture and partly by setting up a contrast between his view of Prodicus within the caricature and his actual view of Prodicus. First, according to Socrates, Prodicus claims that someone who has listened to his lecture will become *educated* on the subject. Socrates seems to exaggerate this claim by telling Hermogenes that if only Socrates had heard the lecture, Hermogenes would learn the *truth* about the correctness of names *instantly*. Second, within the fiction of the caricature, Prodicus possesses exceptional wisdom and incredible abilities as a lecturer. Socrates contrasts this view of Prodicus with his own statement that the subject of names is difficult to understand, and his proposal that the three interlocutors make a shared inquiry. The implication is that Prodicus – thinking that he has knowledge of the subject and can impart this knowledge quickly to anyone who listens – has the typical above-mentioned character flaws.

This Socratic irony in the form of caricature directed against people such as Prodicus is exactly what we see in Hermogenes' description of Cratylus' behaviour and his appeal to Socrates. Just like Socrates, Hermogenes creates a caricature by imitating the type of situation in which Cratylus thinks he naturally belongs. This situation is one where an admirer of Cratylus speaks of his oracular statements as if Cratylus possesses knowledge about the correctness of names and can compel his interlocutor to agree with him if only he chooses to express himself clearly. The irony consists in the fact that Hermogenes expresses his meaning – that Cratylus is not a wise person or teacher – by using language that characterizes Cratylus as a wise person and teacher.

Just like Socrates, Hermogenes makes clear that he is engaging in caricature, partly by exaggerating Cratylus' description of his own knowledge and his capacity to convince others and partly by setting up a contrast between his view of Cratylus within the caricature and his actual view of Cratylus. First, according to Hermogenes, Cratylus claims that he possesses knowledge about the correctness of names and can compel his interlocutor to agree with him if only he chooses to express himself clearly. Hermogenes seems to exaggerate this claim by casting Cratylus as a kind of seer or prophet delivering an oracle and himself as someone seeking for help to divine the oracle. Of course, it is not impossible that Cratylus regards himself as an oracle, but it seems more likely that Hermogenes is here exaggerating Cratylus' view of himself.

Second, within the fiction of the caricature, Cratylus possesses exceptional wisdom and the ability of an oracle to communicate the truth clearly, if he so wishes, or to communicate the truth in obscure statements. Hermogenes contrasts this view of Cratylus with his statement that Cratylus is being evasive – that Cratylus *eironeuetai*. A survey of Plato's dialogues and other sources from the Classical period suggests that the words *eironeia*, *eironeuomai*, *eiron*, etc. generally function as terms of criticism. More specifically, when you claim that someone else is acting as an *eiron*, you criticize the person for holding something back, for not speaking out, or not being forthcoming, when he ought to do so. The implication seems to be that the person criticized for being an *eiron* is acting in an unmanly or cowardly fashion by not being forthcoming when he ought to.[19] If this interpretation is correct, then Hermogenes, just like Socrates, makes clear that he is engaging in caricature by setting up a contrast between his view of Cratylus within the caricature and his actual view of Cratylus. The

19 To be clear, the claim is that the core meaning of *eiron* and its derivations involves evasion and evasiveness. The claim is not that we should always translate *eiron* and its derivations with 'evasion', 'evasiveness', etc. On the agreements and disagreements with Melissa Lane's account of *eironeia*, see note 16.

implication is that Cratylus – thinking that he has knowledge of the subject and can compel anyone to agree with him if he chooses to speak clearly – is conceited, overconfident, and pompous.

In conclusion, Hermogenes' description of Cratylus' behaviour and his appeal to Socrates (383b7–384a7) characterize Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher. Hermogenes models himself on Socrates by using one conversational device that is characteristically Socratic, namely Socratic irony. Hermogenes' use of Socratic irony confirms the attentive reader's impression that the opening characterizes Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher, and that this characterization is an important part of the opening and the dialogue as a whole.

2.4 *Discussion: The Characterization of Hermogenes as a Socratic Philosopher*

One might make a variety of objections to this argument. One might have the concern that too much is made of the fact that Hermogenes does things reminiscent of Socrates. One might add that while some parts of Hermogenes' behaviour are reminiscent of Socrates, other parts are distinctly non-Socratic. For example, one might argue that while Socrates is always reticent to state his own position (instead insisting his interlocutors state theirs), Hermogenes states his own position that there is no other correctness of names than contract and agreement (384c-d). These concerns raise a general question. How do we distinguish the followers of Socrates – the ones truly aspiring to follow Socrates' ethical and philosophical example – from the superficial or occasional imitators of Socrates?[20] More specifically, what types of behaviour qualify or disqualify a person from being a follower of Socrates? Clearly, this is a spectrum, and some types of behaviour are qualifiers that are more conclusive than other types of behaviour. I consider the use of Socratic questioning and Socratic irony as some of the more conclusive qualifiers. At the same time, a distinctly unsocratic attitude to knowledge and inquiry would clearly be a significant disqualifier.

In fact, however, Hermogenes displays a distinctly Socratic attitude to knowledge and inquiry. That is, while Socrates tends to urge his interlocutors to state their position (rather than state his own position), there is nothing unsocratic about stating your own position. Perhaps the best example of this is Socrates' statement in the *Republic* that justice is better than injustice (e.g. II 357a-b; 367a–368c). The question is whether the person stating his own position

20 Socrates appears to mention such a group of more occasional and superficial imitators in the *Apology* (23c–24b).

can and will put his view under critical scrutiny and listen to objections. Hermogenes emphasizes that he is more than willing to do this. Hermogenes explains to Socrates that despite talking to many people *he has not been able to be persuaded* that there is another correctness of names than contract and agreement.[21] This is clearly Socratic in the sense that Hermogenes says he is looking for his position to be tested and refuted instead of looking to promote his own view. Finally, Hermogenes reiterates this attitude of self-scrutiny and openness to others towards the end of the statement of his position saying that he is ready to listen and learn from anyone.[22] Thus, Hermogenes' attitude to knowledge and inquiry provides further confirmation to the interpretation of Hermogenes as a follower of Socrates and an aspiring Socratic philosopher.

3 A Socratic Reading of the *Cratylus*

This section argues that our understanding of Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher should make an important difference to our understanding of two major features of the *Cratylus*: the *conversation* between Socrates and Hermogenes and the *theory* that Socrates and Hermogenes develop during their conversation. While the complete argument for this claim would require several papers, this section picks out two examples and treats them in very general terms.

3.1 *The First Example : The Conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes* (*386d8–e9*)

In the first part of the *Cratylus*, immediately after having clarified Hermogenes' views about the correctness of names, Socrates sets out to argue that both things and actions have their own stable natures. Socrates' argument seems to be the following (386d8–e9):

> Since Protagoras' and Euthydemus' views about the nature of things are wrong,

21 384c10–d2: "I'm telling you, Socrates, having had this discussion many times with him [sc. Cratylus] and many others I find myself unable to be persuaded that there is any other kind of correctness of names than contract and agreement." (Καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, πολλάκις δὴ καὶ τούτῳ διαλεχθεὶς καὶ ἄλλοις πολλοῖς, οὐ δύναμαι πεισθῆναι ὡς ἄλλη τις ὀρθότης ὀνόματος ἢ συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία.)

22 384d7-e2: "But if something else is the case [i.e. if my view is wrong], I am ready to listen and to learn, not only from Cratylus but also from anyone else." (εἰ δέ πῃ ἄλλῃ ἔχει, ἕτοιμος ἔγωγε καὶ μανθάνειν καὶ ἀκούειν οὐ μόνον παρὰ Κρατύλου, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρ' ἄλλου ὁτουοῦν.)

> all things have their own stable natures.
>
> And since actions are one kind of thing,
> actions also have their own stable natures.

However, as David Sedley has pointed out, this argument seems to be invalid.[23] If Protagoras and Euthydemus are wrong to claim that nothing has its own stable nature, it does not follow that all things have their own stable natures. Additionally, if actions are one kind of thing, it does not follow that actions have their own stable natures, since actions could be among the things that have not been shown to have their own stable natures.

At this point, we seem to have three possible options:

Option 1: Claiming that Socrates' apparent argument is not his real argument.
Option 2: Claiming that Socrates' apparent argument is his real argument but that the argument is valid.
Option 3: Claiming that Socrates' apparent argument is his real argument and that the argument is invalid.

David Sedley chooses the first option and proposes two changes to the above construal of Socrates' argument. First, according to Sedley, Socrates does not conclude that all things have their own stable natures, but only that some, most or all things have their own stable natures. Second, according to Sedley, Socrates does not argue that actions have their own stable natures because actions are one kind of thing, but that actions have their own stable natures *by being focused on* things that have their own nature.[24] This might seem to make Socrates' argument stronger, but the textual evidence goes against Sedley's reading. Socrates' conclusion, which corresponds to the generality of the claims made by Protagoras and Euthydemus, reads as a claim about things in general (386d9-e2: "[…] clearly, then, things themselves have their own stable being […]" δῆλον δὴ ὅτι αὐτὰ αὑτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιόν ἐστι τὰ πράγματα, 386d9-e2). Additionally, when Socrates moves on to the question about actions, he takes himself to be talking about the general classes of things and actions, and not just about subclasses of those classes.[25] In my view, then, we should

23 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 56; Victor Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le* « Cratyle » (Paris: H. Champion, 1940), 54 ("Argumentation trop facile.").

24 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 57.

25 386e6–8: "Do things themselves then have such a nature, while actions involving them do not likewise? Or are they, I mean actions, not also one kind of beings?" (Πότερον οὖν αὐτὰ

refrain from ascribing Sedley's amended argument to Socrates and instead recognize that Socrates' argument about the nature of things is invalid.[26]

Similarly, it seems very difficult to make the second option work, since Socrates' apparent argument seems so clearly invalid. Therefore, we have only the third option, which maintains that Socrates' argument is invalid. One could take this interpretation to support a certain way of reading the *Cratylus* that is mainly associated with Francesco Ademollo. According to this line of interpretation, Socrates' arguments in favour of a natural correctness of names have such a low quality that we must assume that Plato is implicitly indicating his preference for the view that contract and agreement determine the correctness of names, which is what Ademollo takes to be the conclusion of the *Cratylus*.[27]

I disagree with this way of reading the *Cratylus*, and I believe there is a way of reading this passage that does not support Ademollo's way of reading the dialogue. The argument is that, in light of the above interpretation of Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher, Socrates is very well aware that he does not need to *convince* Hermogenes that things and actions have their own stable natures. Rather, Socrates only needs to *remind* Hermogenes of some of the main reasons why he holds this Socratic view about the nature of things and actions. Thus, Socrates' argument about things and actions is invalid, but this fact does not undermine Socrates' general argument in the first part of the dialogue, because the purpose of Socrates' argument about things and actions is not to convince, but merely to remind Hermogenes of what he already believes.

3.2 *The Second Example: The Theory of the* nomothetes (*388d6–389a4*)

Further into the first part of the dialogue, Socrates concludes that name-giving is not a task for everyone, but the task of the expert name-maker, who is a *nomothetes* or 'custom-giver' (388d6–389a4). How should we understand this account of the expert name-maker as a *nomothetes*? Is the account historical or atemporal? Does it describe the *nomothetes* as a mythical personification or as a real expert?

According to Richard Robinson and several other scholars, Socrates invents this *nomothetes* as the personification of something purely impersonal – the

μὲν ἂν εἴη οὕτω πεφυκότα, αἱ δὲ πράξεις αὐτῶν οὐ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον; ἢ οὐ καὶ αὗται ἕν τι εἶδος τῶν ὄντων εἰσίν, αἱ πράξεις;)

26 For a more detailed treatment, see Jørgensen, *Appearance and Reality*, 26–43.

27 Ademollo, *Commentary*, 102–3, 413–424.

normative aspects of language.[28] According to David Sedley, on the other hand, Socrates borrows the notion of a linguistic *nomothetes* from the Sophistic tradition.[29] Furthermore, while Robinson regards Socrates' account of the *nomothetes* as atemporal, Sedley holds that Socrates' account of the *nomothetes* is intended as an account of name-makers of all periods – both the earliest name-makers in human history and the contemporary people who succeed in bringing neologisms into circulation.[30] Despite their disagreements, Robinson and Sedley do agree on one thing – that Socrates is not talking about legislators in the literal, that is political, sense of the word, but only about linguistic legislators in some metaphorical sense of the word.

There are problems with most of these claims. If we consider the context of this passage and in particular the corresponding accounts of other experts such as the carpenter and the weaver, it seems very unlikely that the account of the *nomothetes* should be understood as the personification of something purely impersonal, as Robinson holds, or as an account of name-makers of all historical periods, as Sedley holds. On the contrary, it seems very likely that the account of the *nomothetes* is an atemporal account of a real expert, just as the accounts of the carpenter and the weaver are atemporal accounts of real experts: the carpenter or the weaver.

Now, the present suggestion is that, rather than inventing or borrowing some idea of a special linguistic legislator, Socrates' account of the *nomothetes* in the *Cratylus* draws on Socrates' own conception of the *nomothetes* – familiar from the *Republic* – as the person ultimately responsible for the *nomos* (i.e. the custom) of a whole culture, including its use of names. For example, in Book 5 of the *Republic* (461e-466d), Socrates and the two brothers feel compelled to institute a *nomos* about how the citizens should use names in talking about themselves and society as a whole. Socrates explains why they, as imagined *nomothetai* of the good city, should institute a new use of the possessive pronouns 'mine' and 'ours' and a new use of the names of family members – 'father', 'mother', 'son', and 'daughter'. The reason, Socrates explains, is that this new use of names contributes to producing 'the community of pleasure and pain', which in turn contributes to realizing the greatest good at which the *nomothetes* aims when making *nomoi*: unity and cohesion in the city. Understanding the *nomothetes* of the *Cratylus* as akin to the *nomothetes* of the *Republic* helps

28 Richard Robinson, "The Theory of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*," in R. Robinson, *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969), 105–6; Kretzmann, "Correctness of Names," 129; Ackrill, "Language and Reality," 42.

29 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 70.

30 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 68–69.

explain why Socrates introduces the notion of the *nomothetes* in the *Cratylus*. Names – and the use of names – have direct consequences for social division and cohesion. In addition, names serve as instruments for the dialecticians – the philosopher-kings of the *Republic* – in their ascent to knowledge of the good and in their education of future philosopher-kings.

3.3 *Discussion: The Socratic Reading of the* Cratylus

One might object to the above line of argument in a number of ways. One might point out that there is an important difference between displaying Socratic behaviour (indicative of Socratic character) and having (and understanding) Socratic ideas or notions. One might add that the notions of the *nomothetes* and of the philosopher-kings in the *Republic* are more Platonic than Socratic notions. Therefore, one might object that the interpretation of Hermogenes as having a Socratic character in the opening of the *Cratylus* does not warrant the assumption that Hermogenes has an understanding of Socratic ideas or notions. Further, one might object that even if Hermogenes has an understanding of Socratic ideas or notions, this does not warrant the assumption that these Socratic ideas or notions include the notions of the *nomothetes* or the philosopher-kings.

These concerns raise a general question. What are the Socratic ideas or notions in Plato's dialogues? The present paper takes the position that the Socratic ideas or notions in Plato's dialogues are those ideas or notions that Socrates in Plato's dialogues puts forward for serious consideration and appears willing to defend. That is, a distinction is not made between notions or ideas uttered by Socrates in Plato's dialogues and ascribed to the historical Socrates, on the one hand, and notions or ideas uttered by Socrates in the dialogues but ascribed to the historical Plato rather than the historical Socrates, on the other. More generally, this paper does not subscribe to a developmental understanding of Plato's dialogues or Plato's philosophy. Our use of Platonic dialogues to illuminate other Platonic dialogues should be constrained, not by chronology, but by considerations of features such as topic, characters, setting, and theory. For these reasons, the present paper regards the notions of the *nomothetes* and of the philosopher-kings in the *Republic* as Socratic notions and draws on these notions to illuminate the notion of the *nomothetes* and the dialectician in the *Cratylus*.

What about the concern that Hermogenes may display Socratic behaviour (indicative of a Socratic character) without having or understanding Socratic ideas? This is an important distinction, and it is true that in the opening of the *Cratylus* Hermogenes does not exhibit understanding of specific Socratic ideas or notions. Furthermore, while the two example passages read better

if we interpret Hermogenes as having Socratic ideas or notions, the passages may not strictly require us to ascribe such ideas or notions to Hermogenes. However, other passages in the *Cratylus* do require us to ascribe Socratic notions to Hermogenes. One clear example is the passage describing the procedure of the *nomothetes* when making names (389a5–390a10). This passage only makes sense on the assumption that Hermogenes is already familiar with the Socratic conception of the procedures involved in productive expertise (such as looking to the form and putting form into matter).[31] Therefore, the present claim is not just that the assumption that Hermogenes is a Socratic character with Socratic ideas can help illuminate central theoretical concepts (e.g. the notion of the *nomothetes*), but also that other passages in the *Cratylus* require us to adopt the assumption that Hermogenes has an understanding of Socratic notions and ideas.

4 Conclusion

I have argued that the opening of the *Cratylus* characterizes Hermogenes as a Socratic philosopher and thereby introduces the reader to a Socratic reading of the dialogue. In addition, I have argued that a Socratic reading of the dialogue makes an important difference to our understanding of the *conversation* between Socrates and Hermogenes and the *theory* developed by Socrates and Hermogenes. If correct, this general interpretation of the *Cratylus* clearly has a bearing on the scholarly discussion about the outcome of the dialogue. Put briefly, if the conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes is a truly Socratic conversation, and if the theory is a truly Socratic theory, we naturally expect Socrates to maintain this theory throughout the dialogue. Scholars generally hold that the third part of the dialogue, and particularly the key passage 433b–435d, forces us to interpret Socrates as giving up the theory of natural correctness either completely or in part. However, once we appreciate the dialectical nature of Socrates' conversation with Cratylus as well as the finer details of the theory developed in the conversation with Hermogenes, we can interpret Socrates as maintaining the same Socratic theory throughout the dialogue.[32]

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31 That is, it seems clear that Socrates *presupposes* (rather than introduces) the different technical phrases and notions in this passage. See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 126–127; *pace* Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 72–73.

32 A general version of such an interpretation is available in Jørgensen, *Appearance and reality*. I plan to publish a fuller and improved version in the future.

A previous section of this paper mentioned disagreements with Burnyeat's and Wardy's specific interpretation of the first lines of the *Cratylus*, but also pointed out that the type of approach adopted by Burnyeat and Wardy and the type of approach adopted in this paper can supplement each other. So, let us imagine a reader who has read and reflected on the dialogue as a whole returning to the first lines of the *Cratylus* (383a1–3):

ΕΡΜ. Βούλει οὖν καὶ Σωκράτει τῷδε ἀνακοινωσώμεθα τὸν λόγον;
ΚΡ. Εἴ σοι δοκεῖ.

HERM. Do you then want us to share our discussion with Socrates here as well?
CRAT. If you think so.

What image or reflection of the philosophical content of the dialogue does the reader discern in these lines? According to Burnyeat and Wardy, as we have seen, the first words of the *Cratylus* thematise language and the conditions of meaningful communication.[33] If we consider the topic of conversation – the correctness of names – we may seem to have some support for this view since the correctness of names clearly (in some way) concerns language and the conditions of meaningful communication. However, language and the conditions of meaningful communication are in fact minor issues in the *Cratylus* treated only in very few passages (e.g. 422d–424a; 429c–430a). For this reason, I am unconvinced by the specific Burnyeat-Wardy interpretation of the first lines of the *Cratylus*.

I find it more likely that a reader who has read and reflected on the *Cratylus* will find in the first few lines of the dialogue an image or reflection of a theme pervading the dialogue as a whole, i.e. the ideal of joint inquiry and the challenges to conducting a shared philosophical discussion. We already see this highlighted in the opening of the dialogue. According to Hermogenes, he and Cratylus have been unable to conduct a shared philosophical discussion, not because of problems concerning linguistic communication, but because of major differences in their attitude and approach to philosophical discussion (383a–384a). On the other hand, Socrates underlines the difficulty of the subject and his own ignorance, thereby displaying intellectual humility and readiness to join both Hermogenes and Cratylus in a joint search for the truth (384a–c). Hermogenes responds in kind by emphasizing that, while he has not

33 Burnyeat, "First words," 317.

been able to be persuaded that his own view is wrong, he remains conscious that he might be wrong, underlining his readiness to listen and learn from anyone (384c–e). The opening thereby thematises the ideal of joint inquiry and the challenges to conducting a shared philosophical discussion, inviting the reader to make a comparison – a *synkrisis* – between the philosophical discussion conducted by Socrates and Hermogenes, on the one hand, and the philosophical discussion conducted by Socrates and Cratylus, on the other. Taking this approach to the dialogue – as a part of a Socratic reading of the dialogue – holds the key to a proper understanding of the dialogue as a whole and the third part of the dialogue in particular. The kinship between Socrates and Hermogenes and the difficult relation between Hermogenes and Cratylus displayed in the opening of the dialogue prefigure the successful and constructive conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes and the failed and destructive conversation between Socrates and Cratylus. The reader who has read and reflected on the *Cratylus* as a whole and returns to the first few lines of the dialogue will find in them an image or reflection of the ideal of joint inquiry and the challenges to conducting a shared philosophical discussion.

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CHAPTER 2

Why the *Cratylus* Matters, or: Plato's *Cratylus* and the Philosophy of Language

Francesco Ademollo

Abstract

In this paper I survey some central stages and aspects of the argument of Plato's *Cratylus*, paying special attention to their affinities with themes from modern and contemporary philosophy. My aim is to show that the dialogue is close to some of our current philosophical concerns and that, in particular, it can be read as a profound inquiry into the relation between reference, on the one hand, and description and representation, on the other. Among other things, I explore the dialogue's connections with Frege's sense/reference distinction and Kripke's arguments against it.

Keywords

Plato – *Cratylus* – Frege – Kripke – philosophy of language – sense – reference

Plato's *Cratylus* is often celebrated as the text that marks, for us, the beginning of the history of Western philosophy of language. At the same time, however, there seems to be a fairly widespread feeling that the *Cratylus* inaugurates the subject by examining some rather weird views and subjecting them to a rather mystifying discussion, and that because of these features its importance is mainly historical. On the contrary, I believe that the *Cratylus* is one of Plato's best dialogues, that it contains a distinctive number of sound and powerful arguments, and that it is close to some of our current philosophical concerns. In particular, the *Cratylus* can be read as a profound inquiry into the relation between reference, on the one hand, and description and representation, on the other.[1]

I shall try to substantiate these claims by surveying some central stages and aspects of the argument of the dialogue and paying special attention to their

1 My thanks to the participants in the *Symposium Pragense* and audiences in Tokyo and Pisa for helpful comments and discussion. I am very happy to be able to dedicate this paper to

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agreement with themes from modern and contemporary philosophy. In doing so it will be inevitable to take just an aerial view of many controversial passages which would require a much closer inspection and to be parsimonious with references to the secondary literature. I hope I may be forgiven for such omissions in the light of the fuller discussion which I have provided elsewhere and on which I shall freely draw here.[2]

1

As is well known, the *Cratylus* starts when Socrates is invited to adjudicate a dispute between Cratylus and Hermogenes about the 'correctness of names' (ὀρθότης τῶν ὀνομάτων). This turns out to be a discussion about whether the relation between a name and the thing it names, its nominatum or referent, is natural or conventional. What is at issue, or at least much of what is at issue, could be formulated more precisely in this way. Take a string of sounds, *N*, and an object, *X*. Does it ultimately depend on each group of speakers – on the decisions or agreements they make, or the habits they develop over time – whether or not *N* is a name of *X*, or is there a different relation, independent of the speakers and somehow grounded in the nature of *N* and *X*, that has to obtain between them for *N* to be a name of *X*?

Cratylus takes the latter view: the relation is 'by nature', φύσει (383a–b). He does not say in so many words what this is supposed to amount to, but he drops a small hint, a pun on the etymology of Hermogenes' name as 'offspring of Hermes'. Socrates immediately picks it up (384c) and later develops Cratylus' thesis in accordance with it. Before following him as he does so, however, we must first say something about Hermogenes.

Hermogenes, instead, holds the former view (384c–d), according to which the relation between name and object depends on 'convention and agreement' (συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία), i.e. names are assigned to objects 'by the custom and habit' (νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει) of speakers. Even though there are distinctions to be drawn between these various notions, Hermogenes rightly sees that they are essentially equivalent to each other for the purposes of the present discussion, in so far as they all make the name-object relation essentially dependent on

David Sedley with admiration, friendship, and gratitude for more than twenty years of conversation and long-distance mentorship.

2 See Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), which is also the source of my translations of passages from the *Cratylus*.

speakers. This has several consequences, which Hermogenes explicitly and lucidly acknowledges, partly in his initial statement of his view, partly in conversation with Socrates (385a–e), who begins to participate in the discussion by asking him a number of questions.[3]

One consequence is that the association between name and object varies with the conventions or habits which underwrite it: one and the same object can have different names both at different times and relative to different groups of speakers (e.g. different cities or states). Indeed, Hermogenes does not hesitate – boldly, but again correctly – to recognize that his thesis and its consequences apply also to an individual speaker, who represents the limiting case of a group of speakers. Nothing prevents me from establishing a language which is valid 'privately' (ἰδίᾳ) and which may even be at odds with the language which is in force 'publicly' (δημοσίᾳ) – a private language such that, e.g., 'human being' applies to horses and not to human beings, while 'horse' applies to human beings and not to horses (385a–b).

Another important clarification which Hermogenes is ready to offer (385e–386a) is that his linguistic conventionalism about the *names* of objects should not be confused with another superficially similar thesis, i.e. ontological relativism about the *nature* of objects. When Socrates asks him whether he endorses Protagoras' thesis that the 'being' of things is 'private' to each individual (ἰδίᾳ αὐτῶν ἡ οὐσία εἶναι ἑκάστῳ), and that 'Man is the Measure' of all things, Hermogenes acknowledges that he was previously attracted to Protagoras' view, but ultimately rejects it: 'I don't quite believe that it is so' (οὐ πάνυ τι μέντοι μοι δοκεῖ οὕτως ἔχειν).[4] The fact that Socrates then proceeds to give an independent argument against relativism (386a–e) makes Hermogenes' spontaneous disavowal of it all the more significant from the perspective of the dialogue's economy. I shall return to this issue in part IV.

Finally, there might be one last, very important aspect of Hermogenes' development of his thesis. Whether this is really so, however, depends on what we think of an especially controversial passage, 385b–d, which interrupts the exchange about individual conventions and private names. In this passage

3 The appreciation of Hermogenes's views in this paragraph and in the next is developed at greater length in Ademollo, *Commentary*, 37–48, 76–81. See John L. Ackrill, "Language and Reality in Plato's *Cratylus*," in *Realtà e ragione. Studi di filosofia antica*, ed. Antonina Alberti (Florence: Olschki, 1994) (reprinted in J. L. Ackrill, *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; page numbers are cited from the latter)), 36; Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 24–36, and David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 52–4.

4 Or perhaps, more strongly and even more significantly, 'I don't *at all* believe that this is so'; see also 391c 'I don't at all accept [ὅλως οὐκ ἀποδέχομαι] Protagoras' *Truth*'. Both translations are linguistically possible.

Socrates gets Hermogenes to agree that there are true and false sentences; that a sentence 'which speaks of the beings as they are' is true, while a sentence which speaks of the beings 'as they are not' is false; that all the parts of a true sentence, including 'the name' (τὸ ὄνομα), are true, whereas 'the part' (τὸ … μόριον) of a false sentence is false; and finally that 'therefore it is possible to say a true and a false name, if it is possible to say a true and a false sentence' (ἔστιν ἄρα ὄνομα ψεῦδος καὶ ἀληθὲς λέγειν, εἴπερ καὶ λόγον).

This passage has proved extremely interesting for at least two reasons. On the one hand, its content – if we consider it in itself, setting aside for the moment its purpose and its relation to the context – is very problematic. Socrates seems to think that the names – indeed, *all* the names – contained in a sentence are true or false in the same way as the sentence itself. He does not seem to realize that there is an important structural distinction to be drawn between complete declarative sentences, which can be true or false, and their component names, which have no truth-value because they lack the required semantic and syntactic complexity.[5] This distinction is a staple of Aristotle's logic: he insists on it especially in the *De interpretatione* (1, 16a9–18 etc.), possibly in conscious opposition to the *Cratylus*, to which he refers on other occasions in that treatise. However that may be, Socrates' failure to draw a satisfactory distinction between sentences and names can also be observed in different forms in other passages of the dialogue (431a–b, 432d–e). This testifies to Plato's troubles in grappling with this difficult issue, which is closely connected with the sophistical arguments against the possibility of speaking falsely and which he finally solved in the *Sophist*, 261d–263d.[6]

The second respect in which 385b–d has proved interesting and controversial is its purpose. Many commentators take it to contain some sort of argument against Hermogenes. But this is hardly plausible, because no such conclusion is drawn in the text or could be validly drawn: every claim that is made here is perfectly compatible with Hermogenes' thesis. Others – including the last OCT editors – instead excise the passage and suggest that it could be a remnant from a previous edition of the dialogue.[7] This, however, is a costly hypothesis, a

5 Or, if there is some sense in which names too can after all be said to be true or false (e.g. 'true' = 'correct', 'false' = 'incorrect'), this can only be *different* from the sense in which sentences are true or false.

6 On the texts referred to in this paragraph see Ademollo, *Commentary*, 293–6, 347–50, 369–79, and Francesco Ademollo, "Names, Verbs, and Sentences in Ancient Greek Philosophy," in *Linguistic Content: New Essays on the History of Philosophy of Language*, ed. Margaret Cameron and Robert Stainton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

7 The first to argue that the passage does not fit in with the context was Malcolm Schofield, "A Displacement in the Text of the *Cratylus*," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972): 246–51, who transposed it after 387c5; this positive proposal has not carried conviction. For the

last resort we would do well to avoid if possible. I have endorsed an alternative interpretation:[8] the passage might, like those which precede and follow it, aim to clarify the purport and implications of Hermogenes' thesis. More precisely, the aim might be to make it clear that Hermogenes' radical conventionalism does not threaten the distinction between true and false sentences – and even between true and false names, if there be room for such a distinction at all – just as it does not threaten the fundamental assumption that things have a subject-independent nature of their own. This might also be connected with a further aim, i.e. to establish a remote comparison between Hermogenes, who accepts the possibility of falsehood, and Cratylus, who will later deny it (429b–e). Thereby the passage would gain a plausible and important function where the manuscripts transmit it, although it remains possible that some minor textual corruption has blurred its relation to the immediate context.[9]

Thus Hermogenes' thesis, and the developments it undergoes in reaction to Socrates' questions, turn out to be intelligent and profound. After all, this should hardly be a surprise; for conventionalism will ultimately have the better of the debate, as we shall see, and Socrates will pay indirect homage to Hermogenes by mentioning him approvingly – though seemingly with reference to a marginal detail – while he is formulating some of his conclusions (435c).

2

Many things must happen, however, before we reach that stage. At present, Socrates, as I mentioned above, gives an argument against Protagoras, the function of which is ostensibly to reinforce Hermogenes' rejection of relativism

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two-edition hypothesis see the hint in the apparatus of E. A. Duke et al., *Platonis Opera,* vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) *ad* 387c5, and much more explicitly David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10–13. Sedley connects our passage with a later one, 437d–438b, which is transmitted by one manuscript in two alternative versions, both of which he and the OCT editors contentiously regard as Platonic.

8 Originally put forward by Mary Richardson, "True and False Names in the 'Cratylus'", *Phronesis* 21 (1976): 136–7.

9 In particular, it remains problematic that immediately after our passage's conclusion Socrates resumes the discussion of individual and collective naming with the particle 'therefore' (ἄρα, 385d2), apparently referring back to the lines *before* our passage. In my commentary (Ademollo, *Commentary*, 73–4) I have tentatively considered some possible textual remedies; for some criticism see Malcolm Schofield, Review of *Ademollo, Commentary*, *Gnomon* 85, 6 (2013): 492–3.

(386a–e). But as soon as he has drawn the conclusion that things have a subject-independent 'being' (οὐσία) or nature, he lets this seamlessly develop into an argument against Hermogenes and in favour of Cratylus (386e–387d). If it is true of objects that they have a nature of their own, then it is true of actions; and so, just as cutting or burning something require one to meet certain necessary conditions determined by the nature of both the action itself and the object, so speaking of or naming something requires that one meet certain analogous natural conditions: 'one must also name the objects as it is natural to name them and for them to be named and with that with which it is natural [ὀνομαστέον ᾗ πέφυκε τὰ πράγματα ὀνομάζειν τε καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι καὶ ᾧ], not as we want' (387d).

This argument is predicated upon the analogy between actions such as cutting or burning and actions such as speaking or naming. In principle this analogy could be innocuous; but the way in which Socrates handles it is fallacious, because he overlooks some important distinctions. Let *Φ* be an action. On the one hand there is (a) the weaker notion that there are necessary conditions, determined by the nature of *Φ*, for *Φ* to be carried out successfully. On the other hand there is (b) the much stronger notion that the necessary conditions are determined not only by the nature of *Φ but also by the nature of each individual object* on which *Φ* is performed. Socrates slides dangerously from (a) to (b) in his treatment of cutting and burning: notice his sudden introduction of a reference to 'each thing' (ἕκαστον) at 387b4. But while this slide is innocuous – though strictly speaking illegitimate – in the case of actions such as cutting or burning, to which both (a) and (b) apply as a matter of fact, the consequences are relevant and problematic in the case of naming, where (b) is – or can be construed as – equivalent to Cratylus' thesis, and where it is far from obvious (it is in fact false) that (b) applies.

In the sequel Socrates puts forward other arguments in favour of Cratylus' naturalism, until he draws the final conclusion that Hermogenes was wrong and that 'Cratylus speaks the truth when he says that names belong to the objects by nature (φύσει τὰ ὀνόματα εἶναι τοῖς πράγμασι) and that not everyone is a craftsman of names' (390d–e). Here I shall not delve into the details of these arguments, but will focus just on a single point; I shall, however, have something more to say when I return to this section of the dialogue in part IV.

Carrying on the analogy with the crafts, Socrates assumes that a name is a kind of *instrument* or tool (387e–388a) – an assumption which will be criticized by Aristotle (*Int.* 4, 16b33–17a2) as already implying that names are by nature. More precisely, Socrates goes on (388b–c), a name is an instrument by means of which 'we teach something to each other and separate the objects as they are' (διδάσκομέν τι ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰ πράγματα διακρίνομεν ᾗ ἔχει), and therefore

'an instrument for teaching and for separating being' (διδασκαλικόν … ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας). We can try to spell this out as follows: names are used to separate or discriminate objects, i.e. pick them out or *refer to* them, in accordance with their 'being', i.e. the way they are, their properties. It is unclear how strongly this mention of the 'being' (οὐσία) of objects should be taken. In the light of the way in which the term was used in the discussion of Protagoras (385e–386a, 386e) it is cautious to suppose that here too it conveys just a generic reference to the object's properties. The notion that this 'being' could help to discriminate the objects from each other, however, suggests something stronger – perhaps even something like the *essence* of the object. This seems, on any account, to be the meaning of the term later on, at 423e (see below). But however that may be, at the very least we can try the following paraphrase of the present passage: *names refer to objects via their properties* – or *we* use names to do so.[10] Furthermore, this reference-via-properties is something we use names to 'teach' or *communicate*.

This is a highly significant philosophical thesis.[11] But how closely is it connected with the kind of naturalism which Cratylus initially hinted at and which Socrates is now going to make explicit? Let us see.

After coming to the conclusion that names belong to their objects by nature as Cratylus claims, Socrates and Hermogenes realize that they still have to find out what the natural correctness of names exactly consists in (390e–391b).

10 This passage gives us an opportunity to emphasize two differences between Plato's concerns in the *Cratylus* and contemporary philosophy of language. (i) Plato often seems to disregard the distinction between what we usually call speaker's reference and semantic reference; more generally, he seems to switch freely between talk of what *speakers* do with a linguistic expression and talk of what the *expression* itself does. See also n. 20 below. (ii) No one in the discussion tries to give an account which covers the case of names of nonexistent or fictional objects. This is hardly surprising in the light of Plato's worries about what is not: even in the *Sophist* he will hold on to the view that only what exists can be spoken or thought of. (Some scholars believe that being a name of an existing entity – indeed, of an entity identified in the context of 'natural' distinctions which match the structure of reality and 'carve' it 'at its joints' – is a condition that Plato would include in his own account of the correctness of names: see e.g. Norman Kretzmann, "Plato on the Correctness of Names," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 127, 130–2, and Vladimír Mikeš's paper in this volume. I see no evidence for this in the text of the dialogue.)

11 Here I leave aside other, weaker lessons we might want to extract from our passage if we reread it (as perhaps Plato thinks we should) with a view to identifying something that can be posthumously saved from the eventual demise of naturalism. One such lesson might be the following: the *ultimate*, highest function of names – though not the immediate function of every single use of a name, as Socrates is literally claiming – is to be used in the context of dialectic (as in the divisions of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*) in order to discriminate objects from each other on the basis of a specification of their natures.

Socrates suggests, half-seriously, that they should learn this from Homer, and after some exchanges, which poke fun at Homeric exegesis, they eventually focus on the verses about the names of Hector's son (392b–e: see *Iliad* 6, 401–3; 22, 505–7). Homer says that the Trojans called the child 'Astyanax', i.e. 'Town-lord', *because Hector protected Troy*. Socrates finds this puzzling, since he assumes – or pretends to assume – that this must have something to do with the natural correctness of names: why are the qualities of the father introduced as a reason for the correctness of the name of the son? Socrates' answer (393a–394e) is as surprising as his question. The names 'Hector' and 'Astyanax' signify almost the same thing, i.e. that their bearer has a kingly nature; but father and offspring normally have the same nature and should be called by names which signify that nature: the offspring of a lion should be called 'lion', that of a horse 'horse', and that of a king should be called 'king' – or any other equivalent name. Therefore Homer was right to mention the nature signified by the name 'Hector' as a justification for the correctness of the name 'Astyanax'.

The devious way in which Socrates treats the case of a lion begetting a lion as analogous to the case of a king begetting a king, and moreover ignores the difference between calling someone a king and calling him 'King' as a proper name, repays extensive discussion.[12] Here, however, I shall make abstraction from these aspects and distil from the passage only what Socrates says about 'Hector' and 'Astyanax'. He claims that the former name is 'close' to the latter, because *anax* and *hektor* – respectively 'lord' and 'holder' – 'signify roughly the same, i.e. that both names are kingly' (ὁ γὰρ 'ἄναξ' καὶ ὁ 'ἕκτωρ' σχεδόν τι ταὐτὸν σημαίνει, βασιλικὰ ἀμφότερα εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα, 393a). This is the first occurrence in the dialogue of the verb 'to signify'. Now what is the identical item which the two names are here said to signify? Socrates' *propositional* explanation, 'that both names are kingly',[13] strongly suggests that it is not the object named, the name's referent (e.g. a kind or property, the king or kingship), but rather some kind of *informational content* or *sense* expressed by the names.

In the remainder of this section Socrates continues to focus on names whose etymologies are almost or even completely equivalent to one another (393d, 394a–c). Though their letters are different, such names 'signify the same' (τὸ αὐτὸ σημαίνει) or 'indicate the same' (δηλοῖ ... τὸ αὐτό), or have the same 'power' (δύναμις). This holds of 'Hector', 'Astyanax' and also 'Archepolis', i.e. 'City-ruler': these three names 'signify nothing but a king' (οὐδὲν ἀλλ' ἢ βασιλέα σημαίνει) – which in context I take to mean 'signify that their referent is a king'.

12 See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 159–62.

13 What a name signifies is introduced by a 'that' (or equivalent) clause also at 395a–b, c, 399c, 415c–d, 419a, 437a–b.

Likewise other names signify 'a general' (στρατηγόν), while yet others are 'medical' (ἰατρικά) ones.

Thereby Socrates identifies the contribution of the etymology to the name's signification. In this context, for a name to 'signify' or 'indicate' something, or to have a certain 'power', is for its etymology to express a certain informational content or sense about the referent. Furthermore, here Socrates assumes that the information expressed by the name's etymology will be *true* of the referent, i.e. correspond to the referent's *being* or nature: he mentions 'the being of the object, indicated in the name' (ἡ οὐσία τοῦ πράγματος δηλουμένη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι, 393d) as if this is an alternative way of identifying what the name signifies or indicates, or the 'power' it has. Thereby he is obviously harking back to his previous claim that names have the function of 'separating' the objects in accordance with their 'being' (388b–c).

Thus Cratylus' naturalist thesis has been unobtrusively developed into a fully-fledged theory, which the ensuing long etymological section (extending up to 427d) professedly illustrates and confirms. Here I shall not discuss the familiar problems surrounding the interpretation of that section as a whole. I shall merely assume that there are strong reasons for believing that Socrates endorses at least many of his etymologies, although he puts them forward in a very playful mood and need not mean everything he says equally seriously (let alone be permanently wedded to the philosophical theory associated with the etymologies: see part III below).[14] What I am interested in now, however, is that the etymologies enrich both the substance and the terminology of the naturalist theory with new elements. I shall focus on three such novelties.

First, the etymologies contain a number of interestingly different references to the etymological sense of names. This is variously identified as, literally, the name's 'intention' (βούλησις, 421b), or what the name 'intends' (βούλεται, *sc.* to mean, 395b, 410b, 414d etc.); as what the name 'expresses'

14 My interpretation of the etymologies is set forth in Ademollo, *Commentary*, 181–316. For various versions of the general approach according to which they are, at least in some sense, 'seriously meant' see George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. III (London: John Murray, 1888), 299–312, Rachel Barney, "Socrates Agonistes: the Case of the *Cratylus* Etymologies," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1998): 75–84, and Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 25–50. The rival interpretation of the etymologies as a parody has recently been revived by Franco Trivigno, "Etymology and the Power of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2012); I actually agree with several of his individual points.

(μηνύει, 404c–e, 412a, etc.); and also as the name's 'meaning' (διάνοια, 418a–b), or what the name 'means' (νοεῖ, 397e, 407e etc.).[15]

Secondly, the etymologies make it clear (see especially 418a–419b) that the alterations which names undergo in the course of time often disguise their etymological sense to the point that it is no longer immediately recognizable. It is then the task of (supposedly) expert analysis to bring to light the original form of the name and hence its original etymological sense. It follows that in such cases the name's etymological sense cannot coincide with its current *lexical meaning*, which is grasped by ordinary speakers.

Thirdly, names get divided into two classes (421c–424a).[16] Many – the so-called *secondary* names – are analysed as more or less disguised compounds, i.e. contracted *descriptions* of their referents, made up of several words stringed together, as was the case with 'Astyanax' and 'Archepolis'. But this kind of analysis cannot go on indefinitely: it ultimately presupposes the existence of a set of *primary*, atomic names which have to be analysed in some other way. All names, whether secondary or primary, have a single correctness, which consists in 'indicating what each of the beings is like' (δηλοῦν οἷον ἕκαστόν ἐστι τῶν ὄντων, 422d). But while secondary names achieve this in virtue of their being composed of primary ones, these latter do so by *imitating* the being (οὐσία, 423e) of their objects with their letters.[17] The notion of the 'being' of an object is now unequivocally a strong one: 'being' is now some special property, distinct from others such as colour and sound, although no such restriction was explicit previously. It may well coincide with the object's essence.

15 For a complete review of cases see Ademollo, *Commentary*, 233–7. There I tried out slightly different translations for these terms: 'meaning' and 'mean' for βούλησις and βούλεσθαι, 'sense' for διάνοια. I also pointed out that, interestingly, the same or related terms are also used in the etymologies in connection with what the ancient namegivers themselves intended, expressed or meant in imposing the names: see e.g. 393e, 411d–e, 407b, and also n. 10 above.

16 There are interesting similarities between this section and Aristotle's argument, in *An. Post.* 1, 3, that the search for the premisses of demonstration (which can be described as a kind of analysis) cannot go on to infinity but must terminate in some 'first' or 'primary' propositions from which the 'secondary' ones are deduced and which must be the object of a different kind of knowledge.

17 Or, more precisely, with the movements and shapes of the phonatory apparatus in uttering the corresponding sounds (426c–427d). Cf. Leibniz, *New Essays* 3.2.1. On the fortune of the theory of primary names in seventeenth-century philosophy of language see Timothy Baxter, *The* Cratylus: *Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1992), 68–72 and Ademollo, *Commentary*, 301; cf. Jaap Maat, *Philosophical Languages in the Seventeenth Century: Dalgarno, Wilkins, Leibniz* (Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004).

The introduction of mimetic primary names has weighty consequences. From now on Socrates will often tend to describe *all* names, including secondary ones, as imitating or resembling their referents somehow or other (see especially 427c–d, 438d, 439a–b). This broadening of the notion is questionable, but I do not think that anything very important hangs on it.

Primary names are also the basis for an important later passage (433d–e). There Socrates, in conversation with Cratylus, presents the view that a name is 'a means to indicate the object' (δήλωμα τοῦ πράγματος) as common ground between Cratylus and Hermogenes and describes their disagreement in terms of two alternative *ways* in which names can be thought to indicate objects – either by being similar to them or by being conventional tokens which can be expected to 'indicate to those who have made the convention and know the objects beforehand' (δηλοῦν τοῖς συνθεμένοις προειδόσι δὲ τὰ πράγματα). In this context the verb δηλοῦν and the cognate noun δήλωμα cannot mean '(means to) represent, reveal, disclose', as they are often rendered by commentators; for according to the conventionalist theory a name need not represent, reveal or disclose its object at all (at least if such verbs are taken in their ordinary meaning). Rather, these terms are here used to capture the basic relation a name bears to an object on any possible account, i.e. indicating or *referring to* it.[18] The fact that the naturalist theory has a place for the notion of reference is no surprise: besides being an intrinsically reasonable acknowledgement, this was already contained in Socrates' early claim that part of the function of names is to 'separate the objects as they are' (388b–c). What is especially remarkable is that the *same* verb which is used for this notion here, i.e. δηλοῦν, was used – interchangeably with σημαίνειν, 'to signify' – for the different notion of a name's expressing an etymological sense, or connoting the object's being, in the section about 'Astyanax' etc. (393a–394e), as we saw above. But this is again not really surprising: throughout the ancient philosophy of language, including Aristotle and the Stoics, we encounter explicit terminological distinctions between different kinds of significant expressions (names and verbs, different kinds of sentence, etc.) or of signified items, but never between different kinds of signification.[19]

18 In fact already at 422e Socrates mentioned 'indicating the objects' (δηλοῦν … τὰ πράγματα) as something which primary names accomplish by imitating the being of those objects. But it is only in the light of the later 433d–e that the meaning of that phrase becomes clear.

19 The two verbs σημαίνειν and δηλοῦν, 'to signify' and 'to indicate', like the two nouns σημεῖον and δήλωμα, 'sign' and 'means to indicate', appear to be equivalent elsewhere as well: in Plato (*Soph.* 261d–262d), in Aristotle (*Cat.* 5, 3b10–13, *Met.* XI 5, 1062a14–15), and in the Stoics (Diogenes of Babylon *ap.* Diog. Laert. VII 58 = 33M Long/Sedley).

Further information about names indicating objects can be gleaned from an even later passage, to which we shall return in part III. There Socrates, still in conversation with Cratylus – actually in the course of arguing against him – characterizes what it is for a name to 'indicate' something as follows:

> when I utter *this*, I think of *that*, and you recognize that I think of *that* [ἐγώ, ὅταν τοῦτο φθέγγωμαι, διανοοῦμαι ἐκεῖνο, σὺ δὲ γιγνώσκεις ὅτι ἐκεῖνο διανοοῦμαι] … if you recognize this when I make my utterance, you receive from me a means to indicate [δήλωμα]. (434e–435a)

The context (especially 435a5–7) makes it clear that the item thought (of) is not a mental item, but an extramental object, the kind of item to which the letters of a primary name can be thought to be similar or dissimilar – i.e. the name's referent. So the idea could be roughly put as follows: a name *N* indicates an object *X* if (and presumably only if) utterances of *N* by a speaker have some specific association (presumably a causal one) with the speaker's thinking of *X* and such association is recognized by a hearer.

Despite its brevity and the somewhat casual way in which it is put forward, this account of the connection between 'indication' and thought is profound. It may remind one of the semantic theory famously sketched out in Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 1. But it is actually free from the most problematic aspects of that theory, i.e. the assumptions that there are certain 'affections of the soul' which are 'the same for all', that these are what words primarily signify, and that they are 'likenesses' of the objects.[20]

Let us now get back from this excursus on indication to the naturalist theory and take stock of it. In the light of the evidence we have been reviewing so far we are entitled to ascribe to Socrates the following theses (in whose formulation I shall use only 'to signify', to the exclusion of 'to indicate'):

20 For a parallel in a recent discussion of singular terms, see instead Kent Bach, "What Does It Take to Refer?" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Ernest Lepore and Barry C. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 523: "In using a noun phrase to refer to a certain individual, your aim is to get your audience to think of that individual by way of identifying that individual as the one you are thinking of, hence referring to". The parallel, however, should be handled with care, for several reasons. One is that Bach has a sophisticated conception of what it is to have (singular) thoughts about something. Another is that he makes the above claim in the context of a distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference (although he is ultimately sceptical about the latter notion); Plato instead seems to care little about the distinction (see n. 10 above).

(i) A name signifies an object.
(ii) A name also signifies, through its etymology, a certain sense or informational content about the object.
(iii) The informational content is true (perhaps essentially true) of the object and corresponds (or partly corresponds) to the object's 'being', which can also be said to be signified by the name.
(iv) The informational content may have been covered up by changes in the name's material composition; hence it may not coincide with the name's current lexical meaning.

It would be hasty to dismiss the central role played by the name's etymology as an archaic, naïve aspect of this theory. Etymology can in fact be regarded as a helpful route to the notion of sense, a clue which makes it especially easy to form the view that there is a further dimension to a name's signification than just the object referred to. And if you look at the history of modern philosophy of language, you see that the emergence of the notion of a sense of names has been favoured by reflection on expressions whose sense depends on their material composition: descriptions and transparent 'portmanteau' names. Consider Frege's seminal article 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' (1892).[21] He starts by presenting his famous puzzle about the different cognitive value of the identity sentences '$a = a$' and '$a = b$'. To solve the puzzle he proceeds to introduce the notion that two signs can differ 'in the way of being given of the thing designated' ('in der Art des Gegebenseins des Bezeichneten').[22] And to illustrate this distinction he first of all proposes the example of the descriptions 'point of intersection of *a* and *b*' and 'point of intersection of *b* and *c*' (where *a*, *b* and *c* are lines): these two descriptions designate or refer to the same object, one and the same point, which however is 'given' in two different ways. Then Frege can introduce a second example, which does not concern descriptions but proper names:[23] the two perfectly transparent compound names 'Abendstern' and 'Morgenstern', i.e. 'Evening-Star' and 'Morning-Star' (not the less perspicuous 'Phosphorus' and 'Hesperus', often substituted in Anglophone paraphrases). Only then does he go on to introduce a third kind

21 Gottlob Frege, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Ignacio Angelelli, 3rd ed. (Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: G. Olms, 2011), 143–62; translation in Michael Beaney, *The Frege Reader* (Malden MA, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell, 1997).
22 Frege's 'Art des Gegebenseins' is more usually but less faithfully translated as 'mode of presentation'.
23 Here I am using the expression 'proper name' in the customary sense; Frege considers both definite descriptions and proper names as 'Eigennamen'.

of examples, such as 'Aristotle' or 'Odysseus', whose sense no longer has any connection with their etymology.[24]

3

No sooner has Socrates finished illustrating the naturalist theory, on which I am basing this appraisal, than he turns to criticizing it. We must now see what his criticisms are and assess their force and implications.

At 427d–428b Hermogenes and Socrates invite Cratylus to express himself on the results of the conversation so far. Cratylus replies by declaring himself thoroughly in agreement with all that Socrates has been saying (428c). But Socrates wants to investigate the matter further, because he is dissatisfied with his own conclusions and fears that he may have been deceiving himself. This further investigation turns into a series of increasingly damaging arguments against Cratylus' views – both views which Cratylus endorses, but which were not part of Socrates' conclusions in his favour, and views which were defended by Socrates on his behalf.

First of all Socrates forces Cratylus to accept a claim which he tries to resist: that if names are naturally correct, and this natural correctness involves their being similar to, or 'images' of, their objects, then names can be *better* or *worse* (428e–429b, 431c–433c). 'Better' and 'worse' do not seem to mean 'more correct' and 'less correct': throughout the dialogue Socrates consistently expresses himself as if correctness does not admit of degrees, because it is identical with the relation of *being a name of*. Therefore his present claim

24 There are several vexed questions of Fregean exegesis here which I obviously do not want to go into. One is about (i) what relation Frege's notion of sense ultimately bears to that of linguistic meaning; another, related one is (ii) whether the sense of a Fregean name always has to coincide with that of some definite description. The well-known discussion in Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) (whose aim, however, was not primarily exegetical) is built on the assumption that the relation in (i) is identity, i.e. Fregean sense is linguistic meaning, and that the answer to (ii) is 'Yes'. Tyler Burge, "Sinning against Frege," *The Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979) (reprinted in Tyler Burge, *Truth, Thought, Reason: Essays on Frege* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)) argues for the opposite answers. See John McDowell, "On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name," *Mind* 86 (1977) (reprinted in John McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)) for an influential contemporary attempt to preserve the basic Fregean insights in a clearly non-descriptional framework.

seems to be that a name can be better or worse as a name of *X* while still being a correct name of *X*.[25]

The discussion of better and worse names is temporarily interrupted by a digression devoted to Cratylus' outrageous claim that it is not possible to speak falsely, which echoes well-known sophistical paradoxes. Socrates effectively refutes it, again starting from the naturalist premiss that names are images of their objects (429b–431c). In the course of his argument Socrates sets forth a distinction between name (ὄνομα) and verb (ῥῆμα), as the two elements of a sentence (λόγος), which to some extent, though not completely, anticipates the one advanced in the *Sophist*.[26]

These preliminary skirmishes contain several subtle and remarkable arguments which I shall not examine in any detail. What I want to focus on is the fact that from a certain point onwards Socrates launches several *direct* arguments against the main naturalist thesis.

In the first argument (434b–435b) Socrates starts by taking a sample name: σκληρότης, 'hardness', obviously on the assumption that it is representative of a widespread condition. This is assumed to be a primary name, which contains one letter resembling hardness, i.e. ρ. But it also contains one letter whose mimetic signification is the opposite, i.e. λ, which signifies softness; and we could add that it contains yet other letters whose mimetic signification is different from hardness, though not incompatible with it. So if the name succeeds in indicating its object despite the presence of dissimilar letters, this can only happen through the sanction of convention or habit. Therefore 'the correctness of the name becomes a matter of convention for you' (σοὶ γίγνεται ἡ ὀρθότης τοῦ ὀνόματος συνθήκη).

It is important to be clear that this argument not only is aimed at, but also *depends on*, the naturalist premiss that names resemble things. The basic idea appears to be that if naturalism is true, then names (or some names) resemble things; but if names resemble things, then they can do so also in a partial way (as Socrates has already shown), and if so, then they are conventional. Thus there is a sense in which naturalism about names is self-refuting.

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25 Only in a couple of rather marginal cases (392a–d, 437a) does Socrates speak in a way which, strictly speaking, implies the acceptance of degrees of correctness. See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 151–2, 323, 355, 361, 367, 370–2, 422–3. The notion of degrees of correctness is instead taken seriously by Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 78–9, 149–50.

26 See 425a, and Ademollo, *Commentary*, 293–6, 347–50, and Francesco Ademollo, "Names, Verbs, and Sentences in Ancient Greek Philosophy," in *Linguistic Content: New Essays on the History of Philosophy of Language*, ed. Margaret Cameron and Robert J. Stainton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The second argument (435b–c) turns on a different example: the names of numbers. Numbers are such (i.e., presumably, so abstract) that it seems impossible to find a similar name for each of them. This again implies that their names are conventional.[27]

These arguments are powerful. They successfully establish that *some* names are conventional, and from this Socrates could easily proceed to the further conclusion that *all* names are conventional. Yet he repeatedly refrains from doing that. After the first argument he generalizes its conclusion by claiming that convention and habit '*contribute something*' (τι … συμβάλλεσθαι, 435b5) to the indication of the objects we think of in speaking. In the second argument he asks Cratylus where he can find similar names to apply to each single one of the numbers, if he doesn't allow agreement and convention to have '*some authority*' (τι … κῦρος, 435b8–c1) with regard to the correctness of names. And after both arguments he concludes that for the correctness of names it is necessary to make use '*also*' (καί, 435c5) of convention. According to some scholars we should explain away this hesitation as a form of irony or understatement.[28] But Socrates' insistence on it rather suggests that we take it seriously. He might be implying that, though some names are conventional, still there are some others which are correct, or indicate their objects, by nature. Of course he would then be wrong; for this is actually ruled out by his own arguments. So why should Socrates imply this? Is it because he – or Plato behind him – is irrationally reluctant to endorse conventionalism completely? After all, in these very lines Socrates regretfully claims that he does believe that names are, as far as this is possible, similar to their objects, that similar names are better than dissimilar ones, and that convention is something 'vulgar' (435c2–d1). My suggestion is different: since Socrates is going to add a new series of arguments against Cratylus (435d–439b), perhaps Plato does not want him to achieve a complete refutation too early, and makes him draw a weaker conclusion than he could have drawn just in order to keep the discussion going.

The new series of arguments is aimed at the claim, which Cratylus makes and which had no precedent in Socrates' theory, that we have knowledge of the objects if – and, indeed, *only* if – we have knowledge of their names, i.e. of

27 See Leibniz's *Dialogus* (1677), in *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Darmstadt, Leipzig, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923–), A VI, 4A, 23.9–14 (translation in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianopolis, Cambridge: Hackett 1989), 271).

28 As does Malcolm Schofield, "The Dénouement of the *Cratylus*," in *Language and Logos. Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 79.

their etymology (435d–436a). It is not difficult for Socrates to refute this claim by making the following points:

- Names incorporate the views of the person(s) who coined them; if such views were mistaken, following them would not give us knowledge but lead us astray (436a–b).
- The fact that many etymologies concordantly presuppose the view that everything is in flux (as was argued especially at 411a–421b and as Socrates now confirms, 439c) is no evidence that the view itself is true, despite what Cratylus tries to contend. Therefore it is no evidence that the namegivers had knowledge: an initial false assumption may well give rise to many concordant false consequences (436b–d).
- It is not even true that all names concordantly point to the flux theory, because there are names whose etymology presupposes an opposite worldview, according to which the objects are not in flux but stable (436d–437d).
- If names were really the only source of knowledge, whence could the first namegivers have obtained knowledge to encode into them, as Cratylus assumes (437d–438c; see also 436b–c)?
- Given that there is a conflict between those names whose etymologies imply flux and those whose etymologies imply stability, in order to resolve the conflict and find out which names tell the truth we must study the objects 'without names', i.e. not on the basis of etymology (438d–439b).

Indeed, at the very end of the dialogue Socrates suggests that the wrong worldview is the one based on flux. He advances this suggestion on the grounds that the flux theory is inconsistent with the existence of unchanging forms and with the possibility of communication and knowledge (439b–430c). And in any case, whether or not it is right to reject the flux theory, we should certainly not accept it on the basis of etymology (440c–d).

For our present purposes what is extremely important here is this: Socrates holds that *names might, and indeed often do, presuppose a false theory, and thus convey false descriptions of their referents*. This was actually anticipated in the etymologies themselves: contrary to the official aim of that section, which was to find confirmation for the naturalist theory, from a certain point onwards Socrates started to make it clear that in fact he was merely reconstructing the opinions which the ancient namegivers encoded into names and that such opinions – especially the flux theory – might well have been wrong (see especially 400d–401a, 411b–c).[29]

29 See Schofield, "The Dénouement," 68.

Now, if names can encode false descriptions of their objects, this does not only mean that they cannot be sources of *knowledge* about those objects. It also means, more fundamentally (and it would be incredible to suppose that Plato fails to see this), that they cannot *refer* to those objects in virtue of such descriptions. Interestingly enough, such an argument would run parallel to one of Kripke's arguments against what he calls the 'Frege-Russell' view of proper names: sometimes the information which speakers associate with a name is false of the name's referent, as in the famous example of the name 'Gödel', which would refer to Gödel even if the information hypothetically attached to the name, i.e. that its bearer discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic, were in fact true of someone else.[30] Thus Plato and Kripke can be regarded (needless to say, with quite a bit of simplification) as offering two analogous arguments against two different but analogous descriptivist views of names: respectively Cratylus' cruder one, which is based on etymology, and the more sophisticated 'Frege-Russell' one, in which etymology is no longer essential.

The final defeat of naturalism in the *Cratylus* poses the problem of what should be said about the interesting remarks on the signification of names which Socrates made in the course of defending it. We might think that those remarks had a purely contingent function: they were essentially tied to the purpose of temporarily defending and developing the naturalist view and have no validity independently of that view. On this possible interpretation, by the end of the dialogue Socrates has implicitly rejected his earlier claim that, e.g., two names such as 'Astyanax' and 'Archepolis' signify the same, or indicate the same, or have the same 'power' (394b–c). This interpretation, however, is doubtful, especially if one believes (as I think one should)[31] that the etymologies of the *Cratylus* – in whose context the semantic terminology occurred, as we saw in part II – were not a joke, and were not simply predicated upon the naturalist thesis, but at least for the most part were meant as essentially straightforward, if sometimes playful, derivations of words from their origins, designed to retain validity independently of the theory with which they were originally associated.

So I prefer to suppose that by the end of the dialogue Socrates does not mean to withdraw his previous remarks on the etymological signification of names. But then the only possible alternative seems to be this: Socrates severs (or commits himself to severing) the link between that side of the signification of names, i.e. their etymological sense, and the other side, i.e. their reference to

30 Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 83–5. I waive any concerns about the historical accuracy of the ascription of the 'Frege-Russell view' to Frege (see n. 24 above).

31 On the interpretation of the etymologies see the authors mentioned in n. 14.

the objects. These now become *two independent semantic dimensions*. In other words, among the propositions into which I articulated the naturalist thesis developed by Socrates on behalf of Cratylus (see part II above), Socrates holds on to (i), (ii) and (iv), but rejects (iii).

4

Sometimes people complain either about the kind of interpretation I have been advancing or about the coherence of the *Cratylus* if this kind of interpretation were correct.[32] Why does Plato have Socrates argue first, and at such length, in favour of naturalism, and then against it? Are we entitled to take the latter arguments as representing his final considered view in the dialogue? Indeed, one of the arguments in favour of naturalism (389a–390a) is essentially similar to the one we reviewed in part II about naming in comparison with cutting and burning, but is couched in terms of Platonic forms. Then why does Plato let Socrates, not only defend a thesis he will later refute, but also do so by making use of notions drawn from a fundamental Platonic doctrine?

How difficult and, indeed, how interesting you consider these questions depends at least partly on your general view of Plato – on where you place him in the spectrum whose extremes are the two personae between whom Platonic exegesis has been oscillating for centuries, Plato the Dogmatist and Plato the Sceptic.[33] It should be fairly uncontroversial, however, that in the dialogues a recurrent doctrinal core coexists with many examples of Plato's intellectual adventurousness. Just think of how the *Theaetetus* develops and refines the views of Protagoras and other philosophers before criticizing them; or of how *Republic* Book 10 leaves open a dilemma – is the soul in its truest, disembodied state composite or simple? – whose two conflicting horns are explored in two distinct dialogues, respectively the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*.[34] In the light of these and yet other examples we should not be disconcerted by the strategy of the *Cratylus*. That Socrates is made to argue at some length in favour of a thesis he is later going to reject is perfectly consistent with Plato's usual way. There is no reason to fear that this may leave us with no clear criterion to tell which set of arguments should be discounted and which should remain

32 See e.g. Barney, *Names and Nature*, 135–6.

33 See Myles Burnyeat, "Plato" (Master-Mind Lecture), *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001), esp. 4–5.

34 See Hendrik Lorenz, "Plato on the Soul," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 253–4.

in force: the dialogue follows a direction, a course *from* nature *to* convention, and while in the last part of the dialogue Socrates overturns his earlier naturalist pronouncements, his subsequent conventionalist conclusions remain untouched – indeed, his persistent support of them is implied by the words with which he eventually parts company with Cratylus (440c). Admittedly, the fact that Socrates initially associates Platonic forms with a thesis whose refutation is forthcoming may well be an *unicum* in the corpus. But then again, there are other *unica* as well: there is just one dialogue – the *Parmenides* – in which Platonic forms seem to be subjected to devastating criticism and only a bare hint is given that some defence might be possible; and just one dialogue – the *Protagoras* – in which Socrates is made to endorse a philosophical thesis we should expect both him and Plato to reject – hedonism – without any explicit indication that this endorsement is only temporary and its validity is only limited. One would have a hard time finding objective reasons for considering the strategy of the *Cratylus*, as I am reconstructing it, more problematic than those parallel cases.

Indeed, if we may indulge in a bit of speculation, Plato has special reasons for treating Cratylus' linguistic naturalism with special attention. In a number of relevant contexts he sides with *phusis* against *nomos* in opposition to the sophists. Throughout his career he articulates and defends – bringing to bear immense intellectual and imaginative resources – the view that reality, including the sphere of human action and value, has an objective structure which reason can grasp and which dictates the relevant standards of success and failure: as the Athenian Stranger puts it at *Laws* IV 716c, God, not man, is the measure of all things. Against this background we can suppose that he saw names as a case which failed to line up with most others. The correctness of names turns out to be governed by habit and convention, which generally speaking he regards as something 'vulgar', as Socrates says at 435c. But this has no consequences for the other conceptual areas in which Plato is interested. As Hermogenes suggests in the first pages of the dialogue, 385e–386a, the subject-dependent nature of the relation between names and things is actually compatible with the subject-independent nature of things themselves. I surmise that Plato viewed this as an interesting anomaly and that this prompted him to investigate the issue as thoroughly as he could. He did so by lending the naturalist theory, to which he was instinctively attracted for entirely general reasons, the best support he could think of before eventually discarding it. This would explain why his development of naturalism is so sympathetic and contains so many affinities with his own views. It also explains the reluctant tone with which Socrates says farewell to the naturalist theory, when he acknowledges that perhaps one would speak 'most finely' (κάλλιστα) by means

of linguistic units most of which resembled the things, and one would speak 'most poorly' (αἴσχιστα) in the opposite case (435c–d). Thus the *Cratylus* is, among other things, a monument of intellectual honesty.

If the previous considerations are on the right track, of course they reconstruct no more than part of the story. For there was at least one other independent pull which was simultaneously drawing Plato in the same direction: his literary self-consciousness, and his devotion to, and mastery of, verbal expression constituted further reasons for investing energies in an investigation of linguistic naturalism, and especially of its connection with etymology. But these further reasons fall outside the boundaries of this paper.

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CHAPTER 3

Intentionality and Referentiality in Plato's *Cratylus*

Francesco Aronadio

Abstract

The paper aims to show that in Plato's conception of names, and more generally of language, there is room for a differentiation between referentiality and intentionality. Firstly, Plato's account in the *Cratylus* of the relationship between names and named things is taken into consideration, in order to highlight the nature and the limits of the connection between linguistic units and reality. Secondly, particular attention is paid to Plato's awareness of the distinction between the epistemic and the merely communicative function of language, which vividly shows how language works even in the absence of knowledge of the true essence of things (and, consequently, in the absence of referentiality). Thirdly, and on this basis, it is argued for the possibility of distinguishing within Plato's ontological framework between intentionality, understood as the *dynamis* of linguistic units (i.e. their capability to address something), and referentiality, intended as the effectiveness of the relationship of those units with things named. Fourthly, the fruitfulness of this interpretative approach is pointed out by its application to the pages 237b–239a of the *Sophist*, which focuses on the problematic notion of *medamos on*.

Keywords

Plato's *Cratylus* – Plato's *Sophist* – language – referentiality – intentionality – Plato's ontology

1 The Questions

A much-discussed passage from Plato's *Sophist* brings up, among other things, an issue of a linguistic nature that can be examined by comparison with what Plato lets us understand of his concept of names in the *Cratylus*. I refer to those passages of the *Sophist* (237b–239a) in which the Stranger of Elea, after citing some verses of Parmenides' poem, faces from an Eleatic perspective the theme of not-being, expressed as *to medamos on* and *to me on auto kath'hauto*. The

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arguments produced by the Stranger insist on the unspeakability of a notion of "not being" so conceived – namely conceived as an absolute not being. He comes to qualify such a not being with a number of adjectives that leave no doubts: he describes it not only as *adianoeton*, but also as *arreton*, *aphthenkton* and *alogon* (238c9–11). The reason for this unspeakability and unpronounceability is the allegedly common sense notion that every word, even the simple word *ti* (something), is always said "of one thing that is; to say it by itself, as it were naked and isolated from anything and everything that is, is impossible" (237d1–4).[1]

These words remind us of a doctrine that is certainly one of the recurring motives of Plato's thought: there are numerous Platonic passages where language and thought are stated to be always oriented towards something that is. To the extent that they are structurally intentional, they must have an intentional object. So it seems that in the absence of a truly existing reference term, they could not be considered as acts of thought or as linguistic acts. Thus, intentionality and referentiality appear closely interconnected, if not identical.[2]

But the words pronounced by the Stranger create a problem: despite the declared unpronounceability of not being, the Stranger in fact says '*medamos on*' (and Plato himself writes it).[3] The very formulation of the arguments therefore involves a dilemma that remains unresolved in the words of the Stranger: the contradiction consisting in saying what is declared to be unspeakable because it has no referent. I wonder if this apparent contradiction can be overcome with the help of the *Cratylus*, which is the dialogue where Plato more directly confronts the theme of the relationship between a linguistic unit and its referent.

1 Plato, *Theaetetus and Sophist*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

2 To avoid any possible confusion (or any suspicion of abuse of terms), 'intentionality' and 'referentiality' are here used in a completely innocent way, i.e. devoid of the meaning these words assume in a specific philosophical tradition (logical or phenomenological or other). 'Intentionality' indicates here the fact that a linguistic element is structurally directed towards something other than itself; 'referentiality' indicates the effective connection between a word and the existing thing it names (in other words, referentiality occurs when the name's intentionality is successful in achieving the reference of the thing named). Both terms are only meant to describe the dynamic of naming as it is conceived from a Platonic point of view.

3 In the last of the three arguments, after having declared the unspeakability and unpronounceability of the not-being, the Stranger says and pronounces it again, using (and not by chance) an expressive formula even less compromising than the ones used earlier: a simple *to me on*, instead of the strongly radical *medamos on* or *me on auto kath'hauto*.

The questions through which the *Cratylus* will be examined here arise from the consideration of the evidence derived from the reading of the just-mentioned pages of the *Sophist*. The first question comes from this consideration: at the communication level of the exchange between the Stranger and his interlocutor, they use expressions that, from the theoretical perspective, should be banned by our language. So the question is whether 'linguistic communication' is possible without 'saying'.

Secondly, if this possibility is to be accepted, it should be assumed that, although the expressions *medamos on* or *me on auto kath'hauto* have no referent, they are nonetheless understood by the interlocutor and are therefore in all respects linguistic acts, which, as has been said, must be for Plato acts characterised by intentionality. Thus, a second question arises: is it possible to find in the *Cratylus* the basis for differentiating intentionality from strong referentiality?

In the following discussion it will be shown that these two questions generate a third question which has theoretical importance: what role does the *dianoeisthai* play in linguistic acts, if it plays any specific role?

2 One Step Back: The Relationship between Name and Thing in the *Cratylus*

Before dealing with the core issue, I believe it is appropriate to outline the key elements of the interpretation of Plato's *Cratylus* and of its theory of names which I will conform to.[4]

Firstly, the three characters depicted by Plato – Hermogenes, Cratylus and Socrates – represent, in my opinion, three different theoretical positions about the nature and function of the name. I do not believe that Plato wanted to indicate through the character of 'Socrates' his propensity towards a naturalist conception or towards a conventionalist one or to any combination of the two. The point for Plato is not (or not specifically) the question of the natural or conventional origin of names, but the question of whether names are at a speaker's disposal. This aspect, in turn, depends on the relationship that is supposed to exist between the name and the named thing. Thus, we can say that Hermogenes assumes that the name is completely extrinsic to the thing and

4 This is the exegetical framework I have already presented in my works (Platone, *Cratilo*, edited by Francesco Aronadio. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996; Aronadio, *Procedure e verità in Platone. Menone, Cratilo, Repubblica*, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2002; Aronadio, *I fondamenti della riflessione di Platone sul linguaggio: il Cratilo*, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011).

considers it fully available to human beings, whereas Cratylus assumes that the name is intrinsic to the thing and therefore claims that it is not at the speaker's disposal. The point of view expressed by Socrates is that this way of facing the question is misleading because it is necessary to distinguish between two different dimensions of the name, one of which is at the speaker's disposal, while the other is not.

Secondly, the characterization of the name as a tool and the comparison with the shuttle made by Socrates are illuminating in this regard (388a–390b). From this comparison it is clear that each tool has two faces. In fact, there are two aspects that the craftsman must look at to forge an instrument: on the one hand, its material constitution (a lead shuttle would be too heavy, a clay anvil would be ineffective); on the other hand, its function or utility (for a shuttle, passing through the wires of a frame; for a hammer, driving nails). As it is a tool, even the name has two faces: on the one hand, it can only be composed of voice elements (or phonemes, as we would say today); on the other hand, it has to name distinctly and not ambiguously the thing it addresses.

Now, there is a certain margin for choice with regard to constitution (for the shuttle you can choose pine or maple wood; for a name, this or that sequence of phonemes). These choices will result in different degrees of correctness because more or less suitable materials will be adopted without altogether compromising functionality. With regard to function things are different: a tool has a certain function and no other. Of course, we can try to use a shuttle to beat iron on an anvil, but we would be using this tool in an unnatural way. The tool 'name' has its didactic and discriminative function (388b–c), it has to communicate and to indicate one thing: of course, we can use it to indicate another thing, but we would be using it in an unnatural way. Therefore, on the side of the constitution of the name we find different degrees of correctness (*orthotes*), while on the side of utility we find the drastic alternative between true and false (the full function of the name is the disclosure of the *aletheia*).

Like all tools and like all empirical things, which are what they are by virtue of the Forms they participate in, the empirically used name (a name of a certain natural language) is what it is by virtue of the Form of the name, by virtue of the 'name itself'. My third point is that this Form cannot consist of a definite and perfect sequence of sounds, as phonemes fall on the side of the constitution, and this side is compromised by the choices of the speakers. Whatever sequence of phonemes is chosen, it is important that this sequence must be apt to address something by discriminating it from any other thing. This aptitude is obviously related to the identity of the thing to be named, namely to the fact that the thing has its own nature, different from that of other things. The Form of the name can therefore be seen as the nameability of the thing,

that is, the ability of the thing to be named and at the same time the ability of the name to name the thing, with that intertwinement of active and passive aspects that Plato emphasises in his description of tools, in order to shed light on the close relationship that binds the tool to the domain of things in which it has to operate because of its function (387a–c).

This interpretive perspective helps us to understand how the character of Socrates cannot be recognized as a supporter of either position expressed by his interlocutors. As for the constitution, the choice of materials that can be used to forge a tool is relatively free, which means that the phonetic shape of the name is to some extent at the speaker's disposal (390a); as to the function or utility, however, what should be kept in mind is the ontological relationship that binds naming to being named. This is a connection that cannot be found at the level of the empirical name. For this relationship concerns the Form of the name, and the Form of the name, as it is the nameability of things (more precisely: of *onta*), is related to the ontological nature of the things to be named. Like all empirical things that are imperfect occurrences of Forms and aim to embody the characteristics of the Forms, the empirical name is an imperfect occurrence of the Form of the name as well, and it aims to embody the characteristics of that Form, i.e. to correspond to the ontological nature of the thing it names. It is this theoretical framework that constitutes the basis of the thesis presented by Socrates at the end of the dialogue, when he insists on the necessary dependence of the descriptive capacity of language on the knowledge of reality, in other words when he insists on the priority of the *episteme* over the *onoma*.

3 The Communicative Function of the Name and the Distinction between Intentionality and Referentiality

This conclusion and the premises from which it comes clearly reveal that for Plato referentiality is a crucial feature of language. From the observation that language is structurally related to reality, and that it draws its *ratio essendi* and its articulation from reality,[5] it might appear that every linguistic act, as such, must establish a relationship with an existing object.

This would seem to answer definitively our first question: is it possible to 'communicate' without 'saying'? This is a question which aims to ascertain

5 See *Soph*. 262e–263c.

whether a linguistic act having as its object a non-existent thing is still a linguistic act.

But perhaps things are not so simple and we have to take the longer road. After all, if we interpreted in this radical way the relationship between a linguistic act and the real unit it indicates, we would risk making Plato's position fall into line with Cratylus' thesis. In my opinion, Plato indicates a different way.

We can begin with the observation that Plato has no difficulty in acknowledging that names are used in the absence of *episteme*. Moreover, it would be totally absurd for him to consider this use contrary to the nature of language, for Plato's concept of *episteme* implies that perfect knowledge is a dimension to be conquered; and one of the means of achieving that conquest is the deployment and the improvement of our language skills in the *dialegesthai*.

Therefore, it is first necessary to ascertain how Plato describes this phenomenon of the use of names in the absence of *episteme*; then we will have to seek a theoretical justification.

In order to understand how – from a Platonic point of view – language can be used without infallibly grasping the designated reality, we can start focusing on the passage in which Socrates, after introducing and in part already developing the exemplary case of the shuttle and of the craftsman who is able to construct it, turns to the consideration of the utility of the tools. At first Socrates specifies the respective utilities of the shuttle and of the name – being apt to weave and being apt to teach and to discern the essence – and then he draws this conclusion:

> So a weaver will use shuttles well; and to use a shuttle well is to use it as a weaver does. By the same token, an instructor will use names well; and to use a name well is to use it as an instructor does.[6]

The element relevant to our issue is the qualification of use with the adverb 'well', which clearly suggests that the tool can be used appropriately or inappropriately.[7] The possibility of an *ou kalos* use of the name is clearly in the background of the passage where Socrates indicates who is the technician

6 *Crat.* 388c5–7. See David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61, who conveniently emphasizes that "Socrates is now focusing on instruction, not as an everyday activity of language users, but as a specialist skill directly analogous to that of weaving." See also Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato, A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 116: "we can […] understand the present claim as meaning that the teaching expert is the *supreme* user of names, or the user *par excellence*."

7 It is worth noting that the issue I would like to draw attention to is the use that can be made of a name: it is the use that is here presented as possibly used well or badly. Therefore, in this line of my argumentation it is not relevant the connection Ademollo,

competent in use, that is, capable of supervising the applicative effectiveness of the linguistic tools. This is, as we know, the dialectician, defined as the one "who knows how to ask and answer questions."[8]

The occurrence of the verb 'to know' here is very meaningful.[9] From the perspective of the present analysis, this use of the verb supposes that others, and not only the dialectician, can ask and answer questions. Only the dialectician will use names 'well', but others are able to use them, even if they do not 'know'. Therefore, there is a learned usage of names and a usage that does not go with science.[10] This usage, far from giving rise to mere noise, as the Cratylean thesis of the intrinsic name-thing relationship would demand, is also fulfilled in linguistic acts, albeit imperfectly if they are compared with those of the dialectician.

The dialectician, as we know, proceeds on the basis of *episteme* and conforms to it his linguistic formulations. What will be the process by which the other, imperfect linguistic act is formed? Plato does not address this aspect in the *Cratylus*, although he does give us indications in some passages. The passage in which Socrates incidentally indicates the mental process that precedes the utterance of a word is particularly significant:

> When I utter this name and mean (*dianooumai*) hardness by it, you know (*gignoskeis*) that this is what I mean (*dianooumai*).[11]

Commentary, 116, 370, 423, establishes with other significant occurrences of the adverb 'well', where at stake is the constitution of the name and not its use.

8 *Crat.* 390c10–11.

9 This aspect was eloquently remarked upon by Gabriele Giannantoni, "La dialettica nel 'Cratilo' platonico," *Atti dell'Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche* CII (1991).

10 This consideration may seem obvious, but it is problematic for those who maintain that language is in any case referential. It is not enough to say that the dialectician is the user of names in the highest function they can serve (see Ademollo, *Commentary*, 142). It should be explained how and (above all) why names can be used for less sophisticated purposes: I believe that the difference between intentionality and referentiality helps to clarify this issue.

11 *Crat.* 434e6–8. It is particularly significant that these words are pronounced by Socrates when he explains how the concept of 'use' (*ethos*) is to be understood from his (and consequently Plato's) point of view. Use was the criterion of correctness of words in Hermogenes' thesis and was understood by him as a purely external agreement between the speakers or, in extreme cases, even as a random arrangement. From this passage it is clear that Socrates, for his part, understands the use as a procedure of thought (*dianoia*) that precedes the uttering of a word or a speech. This procedure is at the same time shared by the speakers: it is carried out internally by the single speaker and the single recipient, who are supposed to share, on the one hand, the internalisation of an ordinary use of words (see next footnote) and, on the other hand, and more importantly, at least the basic elements of a conceptual structure through which reality is decoded (in other

In the process described in this brief affirmation we can distinguish two moments, corresponding to the two occurrences of the verb *dianoeisthai*. The first moment is what we were looking for: the formation of the linguistic act occurs as a consequence of a *dianoeisthai* of the speaker who, by uttering a certain word, directs her mind towards a determinate thing. By combining this consideration with what has already been said about the dialectician, we can say that the *dianoeisthai* of the dialectician is shaped by his *episteme*, whereas an unlearned speaker forms his linguistic act with a mental process, namely a *dianoia*, which does not necessarily have a true reality as its object.

The second moment involves the receiver in the process of linguistic communication: he *gignoskei* – i.e. he recognizes, perceives – what the speaker has meant. For the purposes of this analysis it is not interesting to understand how such concordance may occur[12]: it is sufficient to note here, firstly, that the process that engenders the linguistic act for Plato is the *dianoeisthai* (by which someone intends something, not necessarily being informed by *episteme*); secondly, it should be noticed that what guarantees the success of a communicative exchange is the correspondence between intending and understanding (which does not necessarily presuppose *episteme*).[13] With this two-time scanning, however, the passage mentioned above is a small but evident testimony to the way in which Plato describes the natural occurrence of a communication that does not necessarily have as its content truths recognized as such, but only what is intended by the speaker.[14]

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terms, we could say that they share the structure of the *psyche* and its being *syngenes* with *onta*; see *Meno* 81c9–d3 and *Phd.* 79c2–d6; see also Aronadio, *Procedure*, 221–244).

12 My view is that Plato supposes here, and for other 'cultural' situations as well, the sharing of established practices among people who live in a *polis* or in a state, a sharing that gives rise to the formation of individual habits. This depends on his conception of the *ethos* (see previous footnote) and finds perfect correspondence, for example, with many of the political and paideutic considerations in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*. On the meaning of *ethos* here, see Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 140, n. 23.

13 An attempt to transfer the normativity that governs the speech acts to the normativity of thought was carried out by Matthew Evans. "Plato on the Norms of Speech and Thought," *Phronesis* 56, 4, 2011.

14 D. Sedley presents this passage of the *Cratylus* as the indication of "the minimum condition for X's understanding the word *sklerotes* when Y voices it – that is, for successful communication of the associated concept to take place" (Sedley, *Cratylus*, 139–40); hence, also by his point of view what is at stake in the passage is a basic process of communication, of unlearned use of words. More strongly, F. Ademollo (*Commentary*, 397–399) concludes his considerations about this passage by maintaining that "it is reasonable to guess that Socrates is giving not only a *sufficient*, but also a *necessary* condition for a speaker's utterance of '*X*' to indicate *X* to a hearer" (ibid., 399), so that what Socrates says here must be

After all, there are clear examples of the occurrence of such cases in the *Cratylus*. Leaving aside the etymological section – which, as a whole, is an example of a *dianoia* that is successful at a communicative level, but does not express truths – we can focus on an example that Plato himself wants to emphasise since he adopts it twice during the dialogue. I refer to the case of the name 'Hermogenes', on which Cratylus and Socrates dwell quickly, first in 383b and 384c and then in 429c. In both cases Socrates finds that the attribution of that name to the person of their interlocutor, Hermogenes, does not appear happy, compared with what the name would seem to mean, namely belonging to the family of Hermes. Assuming that this is the meaning of the name 'Hermogenes',[15] we would then be faced with a 'not good' use of this name.

Even more revealing is the passage located shortly after the second reference to the name 'Hermogenes'. In 429e Socrates imagines that someone encounters Cratylus and greets him like this:

> Greetings! Hermogenes, son of Smicrion!

Then Socrates asks Cratylus about the one who is speaking so:

> Would he be speaking, saying, announcing or addressing these words not to you, but to Hermogenes – or to no one?

From Socrates's (and Plato's) point of view this is a rhetorical question: it is uncertain what kind of linguistic act the imaginary speaker was performing, but it was clearly directed at Cratylus. Despite the misuse of the name, the greetings addressed to him are an example pointing out that, even in the presence of a mistake, the communication is successful since the receiver understands the function the speaker has assigned to the name he has used. Thus, the receiver identifies a link between the name used and something that is named (even though it is a misleading link). This in turn implies not only the full linguistic nature of that speech act (since, contrary to Cratylus's opinion, the greeting formula is a sequence of meaningful words which is received as such), but also the appropriateness of the tool 'name' (since it is clear that this

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considered as the description of every linguistic act which is crowned by communicative success.

15 This clause is required: I do not believe that Plato thinks that proper names are to be applied according to their etymology and derive their function from it. The next passages of the dialogue, with Socrates's treatment of a case of a mistake about names, seem to me a confirmation of my reservation.

is a sequence of sounds that, although badly used, is intended as a person's name).[16]

These simple examples lead us to hypothesise that a distinction between intentionality and referentiality is effectively adopted in some of the dialogic exchanges displayed in the *Cratylus*: those who are greeted with names other than their own understand that that name is intended to name them, even if erroneously; at the same time they know that the name has another person as its referent.[17]

4 Theoretical Justification of the Distinction between Intentionality and Referentiality

The acknowledgement of such a factual difference between two aspects or moments of linguistic production – its being directed at an object and its grasping its own referent as a consequence of its being so directed – is not sufficient: it could be conceived only with regard to the empirical and incorrect use of language which does not correspond to the ideal use. This acknowledgement could give voice only to the dramatic need to counteract the radical and rather irrational aspects of Cratylus's thesis, which denies the evidence of the linguistic nature of a verbal formulation that does not grasp its referent. It is to be ascertained whether that distinction finds in the *Cratylus* itself its theoretical, though unexpressed, basis.

16 The elements of context (the handshake) and the error in the patronymic are not intended to be what helps or guarantees the success of the communication; on the contrary, they are introduced by Socrates as elements that strengthen what he wants to show, that the name 'Hermogenes' can be used badly without losing its status of linguistic unit. If in this example the success of the communication depended on the contextual factors, then Socrates's argument would be ineffective and Cratylus would have the full right to maintain that the formulation of the greeting does not work as a linguistic exchange, as what would guarantee the understanding would be extra-linguistic. Interesting consideration about the role of the context in Plato's conception of language are made by Imogen Smith (2008), who nevertheless reaches conclusions that are excessive, in my opinion, when she maintains that "the *successful application* of a name to an object in any given situation is determined by factors other than any purported 'natural' or 'correct' relation between name and nominatum". Smith, "False Names, Demonstratives and the Refutation of Linguistic Naturalism." *Phronesis* 53, 2 (2008): 138–139.

17 In order to acknowledge that Plato leaves open the possibility of successful communication even in the absence of true referentiality, it might be interesting to examine what Imogen Smith observes about the 'internal correctness' of names or, in other words, "the consistency between the names in a language", which is a type of correctness that "can bypass philosophical questions about reference" (Smith, "False Names," 126, n. 4).

The *Cratylus* draws our attention to two doctrinal elements which, combined with each other, provide this theoretical justification. The first is the plain affirmation by Plato of the otherness of name and thing.[18] Such an otherness, in any case, does not consist in the collocation of language outside the sphere of reality: if so, Plato should give up saying that the availability of the names for speakers is subject to some constraint and should instead accept the thesis of Hermogenes, in its most radical version, and assign the name to a purely phantasmatic dimension, not far from a sophistic concept.[19] The affirmation of the otherness of name and thing means for Plato the acknowledgement of a specific ontological dignity of the name.[20]

The second doctrinal element is, indeed, the ontological configuration of the name: the name itself, *auto ho esti onoma* (389d7), the *eidos tou onomatos* (390a5). This second element needs to be considered more fully. We know that the nature of the name consists in its being a tool. We have also seen that the name, like any other tool, has two faces: its constitution and its function. So, the name itself is the ideal Form of this tool and, of course, we can find these two faces at this ideal level too.[21] Indeed, I would say that at this ideal level we have the opportunity to grasp, so to speak, a distilled version of these two faces that reveal their essential nature and their perfection, as is typical of every *eidos*. The name itself is therefore the paradigmatic and perfect version of both the constitution and the utility of the names.[22]

The perfect constitution is to be conceived as the perfect aptitude to name a certain thing: it is what gives the tool 'name' its linguistic nature, in the sense that it is the reason why a certain sequence of sounds assumes the

18 *Crat.* 430a: "It's one thing to be a name and another to be the thing it names."

19 See *Crat.* 386e, where it is denied that the name can be dragged by the speakers in every direction according to the image they have (*to phantasmati*, 386e3). See F. Ademollo (*Commentary*, 87) who observes that here Socrates is thinking of something that is 'subject-independent, objective'.

20 Such an acknowledgement rests on the previous acknowledgement that the *praxeis*, and among them naming, fall within the realm of things that are and have their own *ousia* (see *Crat.* 386d–387a). *Pace* Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 56–58.

21 In fact, they correspond to two relationships in which the *eidos* of the name is involved: as far as the constitution is concerned, the relationship at stake is the one that exists between the empirical name and the name itself; as far as the function or utility is concerned, the relationship at stake is the one that exists between the name and the thing it names or intends to name.

22 As is known, some commentators deny that the *Cratylus* included any reference to a version of Plato's theory of Forms or, more simply, they deny that 'the name itself' should be intended as a genuine Platonic Form. See, among others, Catherine Dalimier, ed., Platon, *Cratyle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 52–56.

configuration of a linguistic tool. An empirical name has a linguistic nature if its constitution conforms to the ideal constitution.

Thus, the perfect utility is the encounter between the aptitude to name and the disposition of the thing to be named: it is what gives the name its grip on reality. An empirical name acquires the ability to manifest reality if used competently to show its own referent.[23]

In conclusion, I have one more word to say about this. Above I spoke of 'nameability', but this term expresses the name–thing relationship from the perspective of the essence of the thing (which is, however, the most important aspect for Plato in the *Cratylus*, to the extent that he wants to emphasise the dependence of language on reality, that is, the necessity that our linguistic exchanges must be anchored to *episteme* in order to have a discriminative and didactic utility). If the name–thing relationship is seen from the perspective of the name itself, it emerges as the ability to name a component of reality. According to the reciprocity of active aspect and passive aspect, which Plato emphasises in his description of the tools, the perfect utility arises as the encounter of two *dynameis*: the thing's *dynamis* to be named and the name's *dynamis* to name.

Now, on the ground of what has been said, we can state that, on the one hand, a name's constitution is the basis for its intentionality, that is, its linguistic usability, which consists in its aptitude to address something; and on the other hand, a name's utility is the basis for its referentiality, that is, its essential end use, which consists in effectively grasping a certain portion of reality.

To sum up, on one hand the otherness of name and thing, that is, the ontological autonomy of the name, guarantees that an empirical name does not lose its linguistic nature if it is used inappropriately. In other words, it ensures that an empirical name *may* be intentional without grasping its own referent. On the other hand, the nature of the name itself guarantees that a name *can* be employed with full referential power.[24]

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23 The ability of an empirical name to let a trait of reality emerge, giving rise to a case of *deloun*, depends on factual elements because it is related to the occurrence of other circumstances, first of all the speaker's possession of *episteme*. These are circumstances that go beyond the strictly linguistic aspect of the production of words and propositions. In fact, it may well be the case, as we have seen, that the usability of an empirical name does not give rise to a *deloun*, even if it still maintains its communicative effectiveness.

24 It is evident that the interpretation which is being proposed here is far apart from Barney's reading of the *Cratylus* in terms of 'pessimism about names', deriving from the presupposition that names for Plato have to be disclosures of the *nominata* and from the connected consideration of the structural lack of any image, which cannot faithfully and completely return what it represents. Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York: Routledge, 2001), 130–143.

In this way, however, the perfect distinction between intentionality and referentiality has not yet been completely argued because they could be conceived as two co-implicated moments of the linguistic unit which we can distinguish only by abstraction. In fact, false linguistic productions are intentional linguistic acts that do not capture their own referents; but since the false statement, in the light of the *Sophist*, is referential (thanks to the being of not-being), it could be argued that all intentional linguistic productions have their referentiality, either true or false. Thus, it may appear that intentionality and referentiality are not substantially different, being instead two sides of the same coin.

A further reflection on the conceptual framework elaborated by Plato in the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist* induces us to take a further step (perhaps beyond what Plato explicitly stated in the dialogues, but fully consistent with his overall concept of language and being). I would like to show that Plato's conceptual framework implies that the condition of false referentiality is precisely the full separability of intentionality and referentiality.

If intentionality and referentiality were not two different aspects of the linguistic unit, then any name (not only the name itself, but also any empirical name) would be intentional *qua* referential and vice versa, which would mean that the fact that an empirical name is in some ways connected with the things it is applied to would depend on its participation in the Form of the name. However, the empirical names can be used well or poorly, and can be addressed to something truly or falsely. We should then conclude that the Form of the name would govern (i.e. would be the paradigm of) the connection with all possible referents of an empirical name. Therefore, this Form would not consist in the nameability of a well-determined *on* among the *onta*, but in any thing's nameability. So, it would not be a criterion on which to base the right connection between name and thing: the learned use of names would be indistinguishable from the unlearned use.

Even if it were argued, more generally, that the participation in the Form of the name involved an ontologically strong intentionality, namely that the name were necessarily connected to 'something that is' (regardless of the difference between the true referent and the other things a name can be applied to), then there would be no ontological foundation for the statement that a name is a didactic and discriminative tool.

Consequently, the condition for genuine use and false use of names is that the moments of intentionality and referentiality are clearly separable in the very Form in which they participate. This distinction is at the origin of the communicative success of merely doxastic linguistic exchanges and of the epistemic functionality of the dialectical use of language.

5 Intentionality without Referentiality

This theoretical framework clearly opens the possibility of linguistic acts characterized by intentionality and entirely lacking referentiality at the same time. To extend the parallel through which Plato explains the nature and characteristics of the tool 'name' in the *Cratylus*, we can think of an artisanal workshop where a craftsman works by doing things similar to those carried out in a normal workshop, with the difference that instead of trying to manufacture tools that have a certain utility, he forges objects that look like normal tools in all respects, except that they do not have any usefulness.

It may sound incredible, but such workshops really exist. In the 1980s a Japanese engineer, Kenji Kawakami, launched an activity that has precisely these characteristics and assumed (or it was hoped it assumed) the contours of an art form. I refer to Chindōgu, defined as "the art of inventing useless objects", for example, the battery charger that works thanks to power from another battery.[25] Kawakami also coded a system of rules for Chindōgu, some of which are a kind of deontological code for the inventor of useless things, while other rules – more interesting for us here – govern the operations of this type of artisan: a Chindōgu cannot be for real use, but it must exist physically; a Chindōgu must be designed in relation to situations of everyday life and must therefore be understood as such by everyone, but it must convey the idea of liberation from the dominance of conservative utility, and so on.

This short digression was meant to show the conceivability of an object that has the features of a tool, and is understood as such, although it does not have any usefulness. Returning to Plato, we can say that his conception of names and language makes it possible to think of names that, analogously, have some of the same formal features as other names, but, unlike them, do not fulfil their specific function since they have no referent. Clear examples of this type of linguistic tools are the names of mythological monsters and more generally those of fictitious entities.[26] They are names by which we can communicate

25 See www.chindogu.com; for something similar, see also http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2017/09/the-uncomfortable-by-katerina-kamprani/.

26 Recently an explicit reference to the problems involving Plato's use of names of fictitious entities and, more in general, to the issue of referentiality in the framework of his concept of language is made by Christine J. Thomas. "Speaking of Something: Plato's Sophist and Plato's Beard," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 38 (2008), and references therein. Interesting considerations can be found in Bruno Centrone (ed. Platone. *Sofista*. Torino: Einaudi, 2008, lxv-lxviii). A very short hint is devoted to this issue by Paolo Crivelli. *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A study of the Sophist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8.

effectively, since we deal with them just like other names: their employment gives rise to perfectly functioning linguistic acts, which nevertheless cannot have any positive cognitive function, for they have no referent. Of the two uses that Socrates, the character, recognises as characteristic of the tool 'name', this typology of names certainly does not have the diacritical function of discerning the essences. Perhaps, given the extensive use Plato himself made of myths and fantasy characters, he could be inclined to recognise some teaching function in these 'referent-free' names, but, of course, with some reservations.

In some cases, the didactic function of these names may be negative in the sense that the use of some non-referential names may function as a prohibition signal: just because of that lack of referentiality, they may distract from intellectual paths that are apparently legitimate but actually vacuous. This is the case with the name '*barbaros*', which, as Plato says in the *Statesman*,[27] is not a linguistic tool capable of dividing the domain of human beings in an ontologically justifiable way.

The expressions '*to medamos on*' and '*to me on auto kath'hauto*', from which this study began, constitute, in my opinion, further examples of phrases equipped with intentionality but devoid of referentiality. In the context of the arguments of the *Sophist*, they fully perform their communicative function since the two interlocutors understand each other when employing them. Moreover, it should be stressed, firstly, that the paradoxical effects which those arguments aim to produce arise precisely from the contrast between the expectation of the two interlocutors that those expressions refer to something and the fact that they reveal themselves to be non-referential expressions. Secondly, this contrast does not cast any shadow over the pronounceability and the linguistic nature of those expressions, as we can deduce from the repeated use of them until the end of the arguments.[28] The role played by these arguments at that particular stage of the *Sophist* in taking into account *to medamos on* is well understood in light of what has just been said about the negative function of intentional non-referential names: the aim of the Stranger, the protagonist of the *Sophist*, is to point out the aporetic conclusions which the assumption of an austere Parmenidean being arrive at. Of course, such a static conception of being (and of not-being) is connected with a static conception of name and the name–thing relationship, which requires that each name is a name if and only if it is paired with a referent.[29] This is a conception that in the following

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27 *Pol.* 262d4.

28 I refer, as mentioned earlier, to *Sophist* 237b7–239a11.

29 It is the conception expressed by the Stranger at this stage of the dialogue and concisely conveyed in the words quoted at the beginning (*Soph.* 237d1–4).

pages of the dialogue – in particular, in the conclusion – will be overcome, especially by virtue of the development in the *Sophist* of a dynamic and relational conception of being. What we have here tried to argue is that such a dynamic conception of the name–thing relationship is already present though not explicitly dealt with in the *Cratylus*, where the name is conceived as *capacity* to establish a relation with something real, rather than simply as a sign that *necessarily* reflects something real.

To finish, it can be said that referentiality is the expression of a necessary feature of knowledge, in the sense that it gives expression to the extra-linguistic necessity that the *episteme* must always be *episteme* of *onta*; the fact that this necessary extra-linguistic relationship can find expression in names and in language depends on the ontological nature of names and, more generally, of *logos*, which like every ideal reality are characterised by relationality; however, the relationality of language is that of the tool, which is the mere possibility (and not the necessity) of establishing a relation with the reality; intentionality is the expression of this possibility of relationship between language and reality. Without intentionality there is no referentiality, but referentiality involves something more than intentionality insofar as it supposes knowledge.

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CHAPTER 4

What Remains of Socrates' Naturalist Theory Once Conventionalism Is Accepted

Vladimír Mikeš

Abstract

What is the main philosophical gain for a reader of the *Cratylus*? Led by this question, the author claims that the non-conventialist theory of names developed in the dialogue's first part is not entirely nullified by the acceptance of conventionalism in the dialogue's second part. Against some older and some more recent readings, he argues that a core of the non-conventialist theory remains valid in Plato's view and, together with Plato's professed conventionalism, represents a complex position on the relation between names and *nominata* – this is the main outcome of the dialogue (and is also consonant with much of what Plato says in other dialogues). For this reason the paper points out several important distinctions that are made in the first part of the dialogue, notably the introduction of forms of names as a third kind of thing distinct from both names and *nominata*. It is argued that the forms of names manifest a rational structure behind names, which, in its turn, is the basis for Plato's semantics and comes forth behind the etymologies and the principle of resemblance as they are successively introduced.

Keywords

theory of names – conventialism – naturalism – forms of names – principle of resemblance – Plato's semantics

The *Cratylus* is a puzzling dialogue. It seems to be written in such a way that it escapes any solid grasp or even a simple summary. It lends itself to what could be called a "large contextual reading" because it turns its initial simple question about the relation of names and their *nominata* into an investigation full of adumbrations of or hints to the key subjects dealt with in the late and more apodictic dialogues. It is sufficient to remember two passages in other dialogues – the analysis of language leading to the theory of the highest genera

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in the *Sophist*[1] and the passage describing the speech of the world soul in the *Timaeus*[2] – in order to see that *logos* (language or speech) is for Plato the subject of utmost importance and that it is directly related to the questions of ontology and epistemology. In the *Cratylus* we can see beyond any possible doubt that names are taken as a part of *logos*, and that ontology and epistemology are brought up as a context of their investigation. The *Cratylus* can indeed be taken as a part of Plato's investigation into *logos* – *logos* observed from the specific perspective of names. Yet, the drawback of this hardly-avoidable contextual reading is that the *Cratylus* does not seem to contribute much to the philosophically important claims of the later dialogues. At best, it seems to be a preliminary investigation where those arguments about the ontology and epistemology which appear in later dialogues are only roughly outlined.

If, on the other hand, we forget about other dialogues and read the *Cratylus* as an investigation into one particular question we must also come to the conclusion that it is a peculiar dialogue. To an unusual extent, the arguments seem to be lacking proper conclusions or relationships to each other, to be open to very different readings, even to be unsound or conspicuously flawed, and in some important cases to be irrelevant to what seems to be the main question about names. For this reason the whole of the dialogue's argumentation is not without some resemblance to the flux which emerges, in the course of the etymological passage, as a main ontological insight concealed in the ancient Greek vocabulary (perhaps with the exception of the last argument about the flux itself with its sudden adoption of a different argumentative style). It is therefore probably not surprising that the scope of interpretation of the *Cratylus* is so large and that at its extremes we find profoundly different readings, such as Robinson's[3] accusations that many of the dialogue's claims are false, and Gaiser's or Patočka's[4] detection of complex implicit arguments in places where Plato merely makes suggestions. Nevertheless, even in this scope of interpretations we do not find any, or only few,[5] which would advocate that the *Cratylus* brings important philosophical results which might be put on a par with the claims from later dialogues to which the *Cratylus* is related. In its

1 *Soph*. 260a–c (see also 251a–b, 252c).
2 *Tim.* 37a–c.
3 Richard Robinson, "The Theory of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*," in R. Robinson, *Essays in Greek Philosophy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Richard Robinson, "A Criticism of Plato's *Cratylus*," in R. Robinson, *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
4 Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons "Kratylos"* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1974); Jan Patočka, *Aristoteles, jeho předchůdci a dědicové* (Praha: Filosofický ústav ČSAV, 1964), 47–71 (especially 57–59).
5 See however Francesco Ademollo's and Francesco Aronadio's contributions in this volume.

final claim about conventionalism the *Cratylus* obviously offers an answer to its initial question about the relation of names and *nominata*, but this answer in itself does not seem to represent a great philosophical gain. This is not because of unclarity present in this conclusion – due to the fact that it is accompanied by qualifications which permit one, at least on the face of it, to take convention and usage as either sufficient or both necessary and sufficient for names. This uncertainty is not limited to the final claim about conventionalism and matches rather well with the ambiguities mentioned above, due to which arguments are interpreted in opposed ways. It can therefore hardly stop a reader of this particular dialogue from taking it as Plato's final answer to the initial question. But this answer still remains a slight gain after such a long run and not much is changed by the fact that the dialogue continues and we learn that names cannot serve as instruments for the attainment of knowledge and that the general flux is probably not the right hypothesis about the nature of being.

With this view of the dialogue, we may rather safely claim that more than an answer to the question about names, Plato aims at the clarification of the ground in relation to which the question should be posed and addressed. But in order to make this claim more meaningful it would be necessary to show what this clarification exactly amounts to and whether it includes some positive philosophical thesis. It is therefore legitimate to approach the *Cratylus* by asking the following question: what is the primary philosophical contribution of the dialogue whose main conclusion seems to be rather meagre, with many of its arguments seeming to be flawed and important subjects like speech or universal flux being only hinted at in comparison to their development in later dialogues?

My answer to this question is that there is some positive philosophical thesis to be retained which does not consist, or does not merely consist, in the profession of a qualified or unqualified conventionalism. Taking into account what I have just said about Plato's general purpose, I believe that the *Cratylus* is an inevitable *phase* of Plato's investigation into *logos* and its ontological conditions. His method is to show in two opposing moves a full amplitude of two opposite positions on the relation of name and named thing – which means their possible starting points, consequences and, importantly, philosophical associates. While arguing pro and contra, Plato first constructs step by step a theory that he then corrects but does not deconstruct completely. The result is the position opposite to both initial positions, so, in a sense, their middle term, something that could be called conventialist naturalism (though it is not important whether it is labelled in these terms).[6] Despite the fact that this theory is nowhere summarized, it is what remains and should be taken as

6 The advantage of these terms (which outweighs an existing risk that they will give a misleading impression that Plato puts together parts of both initial theories) consists in their

the main *positive* philosophical result of the dialogue. In order to defend this claim – defended actually in different ways by some other interpreters[7] – I will first go through the arguments of the first part of the dialogue with an objective to extract the core of Socrates' naturalist theory. Then I will ask whether this theory can survive the rest of the dialogue.

1 The Truth-Argument

Plato starts his investigation into conventionalism by what seems a sudden introduction of a different subject, instead of correctness he asks about the truth. This initial inquiry (385b2–385e3) starts and ends so abruptly that for some interpreters[8] it is a sign of a corrupted text (as the latest Oxford edition also suggests). In my understanding, it fits where it is, anticipating the argumentative style of the whole dialogue: it shows rather well that, thanks to a certain degree of vagueness, Plato can communicate more than one important

capacity to point in concise form to the important fact that Plato limits conventionalism by a certain naturalist theory and completes this latter by a certain conventionalism (and does not merely propose some better conventionalism or more reasonable naturalist theory).

7 There is a group of interpreters who claim that in the first part of the dialogue (up to the etymologies) Plato offers something that could be called a theory of ideal language (or prescriptive or normative theory of language), which is then set against an analysis of real language (or descriptive theory). See Victor Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le « Cratyle »* (Paris: H. Champion, 1940), 37; Timothy Baxter, *The* Cratylus*: Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1992), 31–2, 48, 77; Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 4–5, 41, 140–141, 148. I do not actually believe that there is such a split between normative and descriptive theory but in so far as these interpreters discover some positive philosophical results in the first part of the dialogue (that are not completely refuted by what follows) they defend an approach similar to the one that will be defended here (though not always the one which leads to "conventialist naturalism"). Other interpreters also point out positive philosophical results consisting in Plato's semantics, see for example Charles Kahn, "Language and Ontology in the *Cratylus*," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, ed. Edward Lee, Alexander Mourelatos, Richard Rorty (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), 165–166; Thomas Bestor, "Plato's Semantics and Plato's 'Cratylus'," *Phronesis* 25, 3 (1980): 310; Ernst Heitsch, "Platons Sprachphilosophie im 'Kratylos'," *Hermes* 113 (1985): 58–59. Particular and well known is a David Sedley's interpretation according to which the main philosophical purpose of the dialogue is to be found in the part of etymologies where Plato displays achievements and failures of the antecedent Greek knowledge. David Sedley, "The Etymologies in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 118 (1998) and Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

8 See Malcolm Schofield, "A displacement in the text of the *Cratylus*," *The Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972), followed by C. D. C. Reeve in his translation of the dialogue (Plato. *Complete work*. Indianapolis/Cambridge 1997). See also Barney, *Names and Nature*, 28.

insight at the same time.[9] There are three points Plato makes in this passage which seem to me the most important.

(1) The passage starts right after the formulation of the extreme form of conventionalism[10] and is concluded by two questions[11] which point back to this extreme form – according to which a name used by one individual and the rest of the community for the same *nominatum* could differ, or even names used by one individual at different moments could differ. Plato clearly reacts in this passage to the extreme conventionalism that turned out to be included in Hermogenes' view. By bringing up the notion of true speech, Plato is pointing to the fact that in such a case truth and falsity would not be *recognizable*. Thus he is not suggesting a direct argument against conventionalism, not even against its extreme form – because there is indeed no such argument here (as many interpreters agree);[12] rather he is showing some practical limits of any possible conventionalism by evoking, right at the beginning of the whole argumentation, another criterion, and for that matter a commonly recognized criterion, which imposes itself on the everyday use of speech of which names are parts. He suggests that convention must have a certain character in order to allow for speech to attain certain features which it is commonly supposed to have, namely that convention must involve some basic agreement with others and even with oneself.

(2) Together with this point, Plato is also putting forward a second claim, namely that the criterion of truth is not based on anything conventional but on the relation of speech to *being*.[13]

9 See Francesco Ademollo's analysis of this point. *The* Cratylus *of Plato: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62–70.

10 *Crat*. 385a6–10.

11 *Crat*. 385d2–6: "So whatever each person says is the name of something, for him, that is its name? – Yes. – And however many names someone says there are for each thing, it will really have that number at whatever time he says it?" (trans. C. D. C. Reeve).

12 Some think that such an argument is not even intended by Plato here, others that the argument is absent in the sense that, if intended, it is fallacious. See Baxter, *Critique of Naming*, 33–4; Mary Richardson, "True and false names in the *Cratylus*," *Phronesis* 21, 2 (1976): 136–7; John V. Luce, "Plato on truth and falsity in names," *The Classical Quarterly* 19 (1969): 225; Jetske Rijlaarsdam, *Platon über die Sprache* (Utrecht: Bohn, Scheltema and Holkema, 1978), 58–61; Barney, *Names and Nature*, 32; Robinson, "Criticism," 123; Rudolf Rehn, *Der Logos der Seele: Wesen, Aufgabe und Bedeutung der Sprache in der platonischen Philosophie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1982), 14.

13 *Crat*. 385b10: "So it is possible to say both things that are (*legein ta onta*) and things that are not in a statement?" (trans. C. D. C. Reeve). What exactly "say things that are" means is not possible to say at this place. I take it to be a general indication of the relation of speech and being.

(3) The third point which the first argument gives him an occasion to make concerns the relation of name and speech. This point is controversial because Plato is doing something strange; he is transferring features of speech to names on the simple supposition that names are parts of speech.[14] It becomes obvious later that this relation is not here evoked only accidentally for the purpose of this particular argument. The relation between names and speech will re-emerge at important places throughout the dialogue and will remain controversial.[15] As for this first appearance of it, it should be noticed that names are rather emphatically presented as parts of speech in so far as they are spoken and therefore they are presumably true or false *in so far as* they are spoken, not as separate entities.[16]

2 The Name as Instrument

Although the first and the third points above will turn out to be of great importance for the overall reading of the dialogue, what we see in the string of arguments up to the passage of etymologies is in fact the development on the second point. *We may say that Plato seeks to set up limits of conventionalism through a relation of names to being*. These arguments, starting with the attack against Protagoras,[17] contain a number of specific difficulties. This is not necessarily the case of the anti-protagorean argument itself, which, in its present form, is certainly undeveloped compared to the argument in the *Theatetus*[18] and is hence less conclusive than Plato presents it but does not contain any directly questionable step. It serves as a real starting point and testifies to Plato's worry, implicit in the argument about the truth of speech, about the extreme form of conventionalism which, for him, verges on relativism. Plato is worried not because it would be impossible to set conventionalism and relativism apart, but because they might become indistinguishable in the space of the *shared* language – and for Plato the space of the spoken language inevitably is a shared space (as we will see later). The strange things rather begin to happen once the anti-protagorean agreement about stable being is reached.

14 *Crat.* 385c1–10.

15 *Crat.* 387c6–10, 425a2–5, 431b6-c2, 432e4–7.

16 *Crat.* 385c7–10: "So is there anything that *you say* as a smaller part of a sentence than a name? – No, this is smallest. – Then the name too, that of the true sentence, *is said*?" (trans. F. Ademollo, my emphases).

17 *Crat.* 385e4–386e5.

18 *Tht.* 151e–183c (especially 162d–e, 178b–183c).

Plato starts constructing an argument which is based on the inclusion first of speaking, and then naming among all activities which deal with some external object and use an instrument. In this way he reaches the definition of the name as the instrument for teaching and distinguishing being.[19]

A number of interpreters have pointed at difficulties of this argument. I believe we can distinguish two main problems here. *First*, whether the general description of action is correct and, *secondly*, whether an application of the general description upon the specific kind of action which is speaking does not conceal a crucial difference between them.

The first problem concerns the strict claim that actions must be done according to the threefold nature-related scheme (which is expressed very concisely in the Greek as the claim that actions must be done according to the nature of particular acting, being acted and with that with which it is natural).[20] Any action not performed in accordance with this scheme, it is claimed, will "fail to do what it is supposed to do and will accomplish nothing."[21] The notion of "accomplishing nothing" may seem to be problematic because actions, at least the actions of cutting and burning used as examples here, seem to allow for some degree of imperfection and thus of failure towards their nature which nevertheless does not remove from them the character of the particular actions which achieve at least something. This strict way of presenting actions may raise a question whether it does not distort a correct understanding of the action of speaking. In so far as it is not clear what "accomplishing nothing" would mean in the case of speaking, the strict description raises a question whether it does not contradict the crucial claim that speaking can be true or false. Does it not exclude the possibility of speaking falsely which could be understood as an imperfect accomplishment of something?

I do not think that this is a real problem of this argument because I do not believe that Plato wants us to think about the lack of accomplishment or doing nothing (*ouden poiein*) as representing doing nothing *at all*. It rather means not to accomplish a particular purpose which is present in some activities. This reading is supported by the choice of activities like cutting and burning which together should *probably* evoke the practice of sacrifice and *certainly* the practice of medicine,[22] that is arts or crafts in which achievement is something more than just cutting and burning, and depends on precisely adhering to the specific nature of the prescribed actions (and we will see later that naming

19 *Crat.* 386e6–388c8.
20 *Crat.* 387a5–b4.
21 *Crat.* 387a8–9 (ἐξαμαρτησόμεθά τε καὶ οὐδὲν πράξομεν), 387c3–4 (οὐδὲν ποιήσει).
22 See Diogenes Laertius III 85; Xenophon, *Anabasis* V 8, 18.

is defined through such a purpose). It is of course not obvious that speaking belongs among such activities understood as some particular achievements but this inclusion does not amount to the error of excluding the possibility of false speech. In fact, in my view the argument does not elaborate on the preceding argument about truth and falsity but offers a different way of looking at speaking which shares with the preceding one the emphasis on the independent being to which speaking is related. In this new approach, "saying things" (*pragmata legein*)[23] on the one hand and "achieving nothing in speaking" on the other may indeed correspond respectively to speaking truly and speaking falsely but is not reducible to it. "Achieving nothing" would not be here a *definition* of speaking falsely but a way to look at speaking from the perspective where it appears as a particular achievement in relation to independently existing things.

The second problem concerning the validity of the transmission of the naturalness of actions to naturalness of naming touches upon the exact relation between action and independent being. It should be admitted that with actions like cutting or burning the independent object which is cut or burnt determines the way the action is executed as well as the exact instrument which is used, but it might be misleading to transpose this relation to the action of speaking. We might think that Plato should be aware that speaking cannot be determined by the nature of its object in the same way that other actions can be. Francesco Ademollo presents this problem in terms of the generality of the naturalness involved in the action: while some *generic naturalness* could be applied to speaking, the *object-dependent naturalness* cannot, and Plato wants his reader to understand the naturalness of speaking in the second sense. According to Ademollo, true and false speech are here again at stake because any concept of naturalness of speech should allow for these two modalities which in fact are excluded by too narrow a concept of naturalness according to which speaking accomplishes something when it is determined by its object – *pragma*. He concludes that Plato is aware of this conflict with the concepts of false and true speaking and is not therefore proposing a serious argument but rather leads a reader towards the concept of correctness which then will be revealed in etymologies (i.e. the concept of names-descriptions being determined by their objects) and which Plato later abandons for conventionalism.[24]

It seems that this problem is the crucial point that has an impact on the reading of the whole first part of the dialogue. I believe however that there

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23 *Crat.* 387c1–2.

24 Ademollo, *Commentary*, 98–106. (Ademollo mentions here also what has been presented as the first problem of the argument. *Commentary*, 98, 102).

is no need to see here a misleading transmission of a too-narrow concept of naturalness on speaking and naming.

The key question here is whether the expression "saying things" or "speaking of things" – *pragmata legein* – embedded in the threefold reference to the naturalness of action presupposes that to each particular object of speaking corresponds a particular speech. I believe that a less strained reading is possible and actually probable. In so far as we do not know what the *pragmata* are, we can take them rather generally as specific objects of the activity of speaking which indeed determine the way speech is built up and even what speech may say about them in order to achieve something and really speak, that is to fulfil the purpose of speaking. In other words, at this point in the dialogue, the term *pragmata* in the expression *pragmata legein* can be interpreted as referring to the common nature of all objects of speaking (and not to particular things which are objects of particular speeches), while "achieving something" (*pleon te ti poein*)[25] can be understood as fulfilling the *purpose* of speaking (which is not yet revealed). This understanding is also applicable to naming introduced as a part of speaking. If we put aside the rapidly introduced and unquestioned claim itself about naming as a *part* of speaking, we may see that even the follow-up of the argument does not necessarily conceal any witting or unwitting error on Plato's part.

Most importantly, the activity of naming in the threefold nature-related scheme does not oblige us to understand the natural relation of the name to its object in the way the etymologies will reveal it later. At the end of the argument we learn that a name is an instrument for teaching and for separating being (388b7–c1). We should notice two things: (1) we are presented here with the *purpose* of the activity of naming; (2) this definition is still broad enough to include possibilities other than teaching through compact descriptions incorporated in the name, i.e. etymologies.

The first point is a support for the reading of naturalness of speaking which has just been presented. Whatever should be the achievement of speaking – whether teaching and separating being or also something more – it should not be just speaking of something, similarly as the achievement of naming is not just pasting the naturally correct name onto the *nominatum*.

As to the second point, it is clear that with the given definition name is understood as a means to communicate some information about being. The exact character of the information is however not plain. The definition is presented without any argument for its particular content, it comes very abruptly

25 *Crat.* 387c2–3.

and in rather conspicuous and intriguing parallel to a pin-beating (if we adopt the translation of F. Ademollo)[26] which suggests itself as an analogy rather than a mere example. I believe that one reason why Plato can propose this definition without much ado is his general approach to names in other dialogues. On many occasions, a name is for him a sign of the unity which gives direction to inquiries seeking to answer the question of *ti esti*. This is what we see in the *Meno* (74d) and the *Laches* (192a–b), among early dialogues, and in the *Republic* (V 470b, X 596a), *Sophist* (240a), *Timaeus* (83b–c), and *Laws* (X 895d–e), among later dialogues. In Plato's view, any name seems to transmit information about some unity of being – without describing it. For this reason we can also understand two parts of the definition of name as mutually clarifying: the name teaches by separating something from something.[27] It can separate some unities one from another, as well as particulars from other particulars, by giving them the names of the unities embracing them. It is important to observe that nothing at this point of the dialogue obliges us to limit the function of name to its descriptive content revealed later – neither on the first acquaintance with the dialogue, nor in its thorough interpretation which takes into account later developments of particular arguments.[28] In support of this, we should notice that Plato uses the plural form *didaskomen ti allelous – we* teach something to each other, when he describes the function of name for the first time.[29] This strongly suggests that he does not refer to some special use of names but to what everybody can recognize as a part of a common practice: we indeed teach each other something when we use names while speaking, namely we communicate information about some structure of being, about certain unities and their separation. This is an important point in Plato's thought in other dialogues and it would be strange if it were not present also in the dialogue about names. In the *Phaedrus* we find interesting though indirect support of this view when it is suggested that the capacity to unite and separate is the ground for any speaking (of which dialectic, in the form presented in the *Phaedrus*, is only an elaboration).[30] At *Cratylus* 388c3–6 there is

26 Ademollo, *Commentary*, 108–109.

27 See Barney, *Names and Nature*, 45. See also Platon, *Cratyle*, Traduction inédite, introduction, notes, bibliographie et index par Catherine Dalimier (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 202.

28 For a similar emphasis, see Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 60–1. Sedley offers three ways of how the name can be taken to fulfil its definition: *designation*, *taxonomy* and *analysis*. He insists that the first two ways of distinguishing, i.e. separating, "the threads of beings" (which correspond to picking up individuals and marking off species) cannot be eliminated in favour of *analysis* (which corresponds to etymologies).

29 *Crat*. 388b10. See Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 61.

30 *Phdr*. 261a, 265d–266b.

a minor shift in terms when a pin-beater is proclaimed to be an instrument for weaving, used well when used by a weaver, whereas up to that point only the activity of pin-beating was referred to. This suggests again that Plato is hinting at naming as a part of some more complex activity which alone can provide a standard for the good use of names as instruments.

On this reading, Plato does not make an error but slowly cuts the edges of the conventionalist position by defending a ground that allows for different subsequent interpretations. His fault – when we leave aside the strange way he speaks about the relation of speaking and naming – is at most that he speaks vaguely, which is necessary if he wants to develop the theory further towards a mimetic naturalism. In any case, the definition of the name reached so far is understandable in the context of Plato's thought. Teaching and dividing cannot be limited only to the very specific practice of making divisions, like those we see in the *Sophist*, and is not something to be abandoned.

The peak of this charge against conventionalism is however still to be reached.[31] It should be noted how well the introduction of the giver of names fits into the style of Plato's argumentation. As a reply to the question who provides the instrument to *didaskalos* (instructor), the good user of names, Socrates proposes to Hermogenes one of the terms he himself used at the beginning. Hermogenes' *nomos* (custom, usage, etc.),[32] set in the context of Socrates' argument, has however turned out to have a different meaning and Hermogenes does not really recognize it.[33] *Nomothethes* which is then introduced with Hermogenes' approval is another example of a vague term allowing for different interpretations. For this reason I think that the best translation of the term, here in the *Cratylus*, would be "custom-giver" (or "rule-setter" with Reeve). In what follows, Plato describes the act of the creation of names which leads him to the postulation of the entity of the *eidos* of name.

3 Forms of Names

The whole passage describing the creation of an instrument (389a5–390a4) turns out to be very challenging for detailed analysis. The principal reason, however, is not that Plato is presenting something very complex but rather that he wants to introduce and emphasize several different distinctions in a

31 I disagree here with Barney (*Names and Nature*, 43) and Goldschmidt (*Essai*, 53) who both think that conventionalism was already eliminated.

32 *Crat.* 384d6.

33 *Crat.* 388d6–13.

very short space. The basic framework is simple: when instruments are created, their makers look at *something* as a model and they embody *something* in a convenient material. Plato introduces here a theory of forms, using several different descriptions for the thing that is looked at and for the thing which is embodied. The variety of these descriptions may cause initial confusion, which is then easily increased by the fact that Plato starts speaking at the same time about plurality within a general kind of instrument, i.e. in this particular example, a plurality of different types of pin-beater for different types of garments.[34] Finally Plato adds an idea of the third plurality, that of different *embodiments* of one form.[35] On the whole, the passage may give an impression that only one kind of thing is looked at, namely the form of the instrument *simpliciter*, and other things, namely the specific natures, are embodied (and not looked at). However, I think that in the end the text shows clearly that this is not the case and that the ease with which Plato uses terms here is a sign that he does not elaborate on or refer to a specific theory of hierarchically organised forms (as some interpreters believed)[36] but focuses on a different issue, namely on making few rather simple distinctions.

In fact, craftsmen look at a general form[37] as well as specific forms,[38] and they embody the former[39] as well as the latter in a given material.[40] In other words, the distinction between general and specific forms is not the most important distinction here, and even less the one between what exactly is looked at and what is embodied. The crucial point is that in this passage only the forms of names are called names, whereas the final product created by putting the name in sounds and syllables is not. Names already exist because the custom-giver (or rule-setter) looks at them and his or her task is to find the right ones and embody them. This key distinction between names and sounds/syllables is further emphasized by Plato's claim that different sounds and syllables may contain one and the same form of the name.[41] He even says

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34 *Crat.* 389b8–c1.

35 *Crat.* 389d8–390a10.

36 Brian Calvert, "Forms and Flux in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Phronesis* 15, 1 (1970): 28–34; Goldschmidt, *Essai*, 78. See also Kahn, "Language and Ontology," 162 and Heitsch, "Platons Sprachphilosophie," 57.

37 *Crat.* 389a3–6 (pin-beater), 389d6–7 (name).

38 *Crat.* 390e2–3: "… who looks to the name belonging to each thing in virtue of its nature" (trans. Ademollo) (… τὸν ἀποβλέποντα εἰς τὸ τῇ φύσει ὄνομα ὂν).

39 *Crat.* 389b10: "all must have the form of the pin-beater" (πάσας μὲν δεῖ τὸ τῆς κερκίδος ἔχειν εἶδος).

40 *Crat.* 389c1, 390a6–8, 390b1–3.

41 *Crat.* 389d8–390a3.

that the appropriate name can be in *whichever* syllables (*en hopoiaisoun sullabais*)[42] and makes clear that he thinks about the sameness passing across the boundaries of different languages. To this distinction another one is added: the forms of names are distinguished from what these names are names of. Thanks to the elaborate and detailed construction of analogies with other crafts, we should conclude that the pronoun *hekaston*, "each", used for objects of these names,[43] cannot refer to particular things but to some unities over particulars, most naturally to the forms of things which are introduced as ones over many in this passage (the name is related to the *nominatum* as the particular kind of pin-beater is to the particular kind of garment).[44] This is in fact a natural development of the idea that by naming we distinguish being and teach about it.

In sum, we should conclude that the *forms of names* or *naturally appropriate names* are something different from the forms of things, on the one hand, and the material, i.e. letters and syllables, on the other. With this three-fold scheme Plato reaches a very specific point of his refutation of conventionalism. It is clear from Socrates' summary that it is this stable natural name and its clear distinction from mere letters and syllables that enables him to say that names belong to things (*pragmata*) in accordance with nature.[45] At the same time it is obvious that these names are not names as they were understood in either of the two initial positions on the correctness of names. Both of these initial positions worked merely with the simple relation *nomen-nominatum*.

This is the real peak of the refutation of conventionalism and the core of what could be called Socrates' naturalist theory. There are three questions that I would like to ask now. *What does Plato's introduction of the forms of names amount to? What does happen with this theory in the rest of the Plato's defence of naturalist theory up to the analysis of the elements of primary names? What does Plato's subsequent criticism mean for this theory of forms of names?*

4.1 *Question: What Does Plato's Introduction of the Forms of Names Amount To?*

The first of these questions is easier to answer if we start by looking at what Plato has *not* achieved by introducing the forms of names. Given that after

42 *Crat.* 390a7.

43 *Crat.* 389b10, 389c4, 389c6, 389d1, 389d4 (it is actually conspicuous, though often unnoticed by interpreters, that *nominata*, referred to so far as things – *onta*, *pragmata* – are now referred to by a pronoun).

44 See Kahn, "Language and Ontology," 163; Donald Allan, "The Problem of *Cratylus*," *American Journal of Philology* 75 (1954): 281.

45 *Crat.* 390d9–e5.

Socrates' summary he lets him react to Hermogenes' doubts by saying that he is not speaking about any natural correctness,[46] Plato probably did not entirely respond to the question of the correctness of names. Another thing that Plato did not do, I believe, is establish the forms of names as a layer of being parallel to the forms of things and existing *independently* of language (whether language is considered as a lexicon or speech). Although we might be tempted to think that Plato did precisely this when we see that the custom-giver looks for and discovers names *before* embodying them,[47] I take it rather as Plato's way to emphasize that what makes a name a name is not its phonetic material but what is *in* that material and what – most importantly – exists in relation to some other stable being, the *nominatum*. Plato is thus emphasizing the existence of a rational structure that we can recognize as names – the structure which, moreover, is universal as follows from his remarks on the same form of name in different languages.[48] If this is the core of his argument, it should not be taken to suggest that forms of names match one to one to the forms of things and can, *but do not have to*, be inserted in the phonetic material. If we were to understand the notion of forms of names in this way, we would I think end up with a strangely unintelligible theory with no parallel in the rest of the corpus. If, on the contrary, we understand the form of name as something which is in the phonetic material *in so far as* this latter constitutes a name, the whole concept boils down to the claim that names, in the sense we use the term from the beginning of the dialogue, possess some form which is what makes them what they are. The wording of Socrates' summary of this passage[49] certainly suggests this reading, which would bring the whole concept closer to the notion of the forms in matter in the *Phaedo*:[50] there is natural name and *its form* is embodied.

Nevertheless, this last formulation also clearly repeats that names are logically antecedent to letters and syllables. What is the natural name of each *nominatum*? I do not think that at this point of the dialogue we have other options of how to understand it except from what we have learned about the name so far in the dialogue. The argument about forms is an immediate development of the definition of name as the tool for teaching and distinguishing being. "Natural name" must fulfil this function and because we are not given any other information about the way it can be done, we should still understand

46 *Crat.* 391a4.
47 *Crat.* 389d6, 390e2.
48 *Crat.* 389d8–390a3.
49 *Crat.* 390d9–e5.
50 *Phd.* 102d, 103b.

it in the same way as we did when the function was first introduced (without any further clues). Names distinguish beings and this is also the way they fulfil the function of teaching. Any name distinguishes being by simply setting one *nominatum* apart from other *nominata* and it does this by giving it a name which is different from their names; this is the way any name sets apart one unit of being, in a very general sense, from other units of being distinguished by other names. Helped by what seems to be presented as a generally accepted view in some of Plato's other dialogues,[51] in this way without many further clues we can naturally understand how names function, be it as items in a lexicon or in locutions of speech.

If we are now supposed to imagine how this function can be fulfilled by a *natural name* which is logically primary to letters and syllables, we are obliged to understand it as a capacity of the natural name to depict its *nominatum* as simply *different from* other *nominata*. Names depict differences by being simply different from each other; by being parts of a *system of differences*. As a part of such a system each name relates naturally to its *nominatum* because it *differs* from other natural names that relate to their *nominata*.

This understanding of the forms of names or naturally belonging names presupposes that names are not seen as separate items and that their relation to *nominata* are defined in their mutual relations. There is one important hint (and a hint is sometimes the most we get in this dialogue) that this is what Plato has in mind here, namely the introduction – which for this argument itself is conspicuously redundant – of the dialectician as a person who can supervise and judge the work of the *nomothetes*.[52] We can leave aside how the introduction of the dialectician, presented as an expert in asking and answering, that is in using names in speech, turns upside down the argument about the *creation* of names. In so far as the character of the dialectician is understandable at all at this point, it evokes unmistakeably an examination of divisions of beings in their mutual relations as they appear in speech and can be examined in speech. The above-mentioned passage in the *Phaedrus* would be here probably the most direct reference.[53] Another hint that naturally befitting names are considered here as parts of a system of differences and not, for example, as bearing some descriptive content, is the sentence which says about the form of pin-beater: "Then wouldn't it be most right to call it that which itself is a pin-beater?"[54] The most appropriate way to refer to the form

51 See page 74.
52 *Crat.* 390b1–390d8.
53 See n. 30.
54 *Crat.* 389b5–6: Οὐκοῦν ἐκεῖνο δικαιότατ' ἂν αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκὶς καλέσαιμεν.

of pin-beater is to simply distinguish it by its name and emphasize the superior way of its being (*auto ho estin*).

In sum, it seems that we can think about the natural names or forms of names as about some *units of sense* which are related to some stable structure (forms of things) and gain their appropriateness in relation to other units of sense. This relation to some stable rational structure is what allows for Plato's conclusion which picks up partly a formulation of Cratylus' position that names belong to things naturally.

4.2 *Question: What Happens with This Theory Next, in the Rest of Plato's Defence of the Naturalist Stance Up to the Analysis of the Elements of Primary Names?*

The first conspicuous – and possibly suspicious – fact is that the notion of the form of name does not reappear in the rest of the dialogue. The silence in itself, however, and especially in a dialogue like the *Cratylus*, can hardly be a persuasive argument that the concept of the natural name is not considered seriously. Those who claim that it is a mere part of the theory which is later altogether abandoned would have to say what is wrong with this particular concept. Furthermore, the silence is not inexplicable. In my view, the summary in which Plato speaks in favour of naturalism[55] is the point after which the perspective changes. In the argument about the forms, the relation of the natural name to its *nominatum* was analysed in a radical abstraction from the phonetic material. Some *unity* of sense was contrasted with *plurality* on the side of the material in which the name is embodied, which thus became "whichever material".[56] When Socrates is now asked what this newly discovered, let us say, *general* correctness of names consists in,[57] he will again start considering a name as a whole including a phonetic material. Plato gained an understanding that a name is a complex entity constituted by *something in something*. Now he will quite naturally continue his analysis by taking into account that in order to understand what a name is we cannot stop only at the relation of the form of a name to the *nominatum* but must consider also the relation of its phonetic material to this very form *and* to the *nominatum*. More precisely, Plato shows that he is aware that a name consists in the relation of the phonetic material to the relation between the form and the *nominatum*. The phonetic material when it is involved in a name is obviously a *formed* material.

55 *Crat.* 390d9–e5.

56 See n. 42.

57 *Crat.* 390e6–391a3.

The change of perspective then consists in looking at name as at the relation of *phono-semantic unit* to its *nominatum*.

There are two basic things that this new perspective immediately brings along (after the first preparatory series of etymologies of Homeric names).[58] The first is the change of vocabulary: as phono-semantic units the names *express* (*deloi*),[59] *signify* (*semainei*)[60] and have certain *power – dynamis* (which consists in a capacity to show something).[61] Interestingly, this expressive or revealing relation of name to *nominatum* is again examined with reference to the case of a unity or sameness in plurality. An examination of Homer's belief about the correctness of names[62] shows that there might be some unity of sense in a plurality of letters and syllables but this time the letters and syllables are not qualified as "whichever". This is directly related to the second important thing that emerges with the change of perspective. The phonetic material of formed names is structured in such a way that it has a capacity to point to other units of sense which exist separately as phono-semantic names.

The important thing is that phonetic material does not simply express or signify something but, through its sound, manifests some *dynamis* which reveals the relation of the sound to the *nominatum*; in the case of the examined unity in plurality of letters and syllables the *dynamis* reveals the relation of different sounds to something identical.[63] Not the phonetic material but the name as a phono-semantic unit expresses or signifies. In other words, what we have here instead of forms of names on the one hand and phonetic material on the other are *formed names*. The perspective has changed but the relation that constitutes the name as phono-semantic unit is based on the understanding of the form *in* letters and syllables. The disembodied forms of natural names are not mentioned but have not disappeared. We may say that in the argument about forms we are presented with an *ontology* of the name, and in the argument which follows we are introduced into Plato's *semantics* based on that ontology; however, the ontology is still what makes the link between the two arguments because the main point of Plato's examination of Homer's belief is the conclusion that there is some order of being which is superior even to the

58 *Crat.* 391c10–393c7.
59 *Crat.* 393e3–4, 394c2.
60 *Crat.* 393a6, d2, 394c1, c4.
61 *Crat.* 394b4, b7, 394c8.
62 See *Crat.* 393b3–4 where it is labelled as such.
63 *Crat.* 394c6–9: "We would find probably many other [names] which differ by their syllables and letters but utter the same by their power." (καὶ ἕτερα ἂν ἴσως συχνὰ εὕροιμεν ταῖς μὲν συλλαβαῖς καὶ τοῖς γράμμασι διαφωνοῦντα, τῇ δὲ δυνάμει ταὐτὸν φθεγγόμενα).

order of natural procreation. Particulars may be born to certain kinds in a way that goes "against nature" (*para physin*)[64] in the sense that they do not follow what is supposed to be the natural order of procreation but they always belong to some kind or other and their names should reflect this ontological order.

Neither this ontology nor this semantics is compromised in either the long passage of etymologies (394e–421c) or in its culmination in the search for the *stoicheia* of the intra-referring system of names revealed in etymologies (421c3–427d3). The passage on the *stoicheia*, however, introduces again the act of creating names and the character of the custom-giver, but the fact that neither the form of name nor naturally belonging name is mentioned may evoke suspicion that it has been abandoned. Is this the case? The first caveat against any hasty conclusion should be that the whole passage is notoriously difficult and in order to be able to say what gets lost here we would have to be sure first that we know what really goes on in this passage. The main reason for the difficulty of the passage lies in the fact that, once again, Plato aims at more than one target at the same time. One thing seems to be clear: he certainly looks for the foundation of the system of names (because in the etymologies names turned out to be a system in the sense that one name refers to other, related, names of which some are more basic, and a question should be raised whether its limits are not limits of a certain way of revealing through names). For this reason Plato draws boundaries – with a meaningful hesitation and vagueness –between names and *first names* and between names and their elements.[65] Names, including the first names, manifest beings (*phanera hemin poein ta onta*)[66] or reveal what each being is (*deloun hoion hekaston esti ton onton*),[67] while the elements-*stoicheia* of the primary names should *imitate* those beings.[68] The imitation by the *stoicheia* is a foundation for the way in which the primary names reveal. (This is what Plato means when he says that the correctness of the primary names, though still consisting in revealing, is to be observed differently.) I believe that at this boundary between names and *stoicheia* Plato seeks a distinction between names which can still be divided

64 *Crat.* 394d5.

65 The hesitation consists in the fact that Socrates speaks about *stoicheia* in different senses, first as a bottom of the system of names (422b2, b5, b10) but later as analysable elements of names, i.e. letters. The hesitation is meaningful because the question lurking in the background is: what are the smallest parts of the system we can take as names? I disagree here with Annas ("Knowledge and Language," 106–108) or Baxter (*Critique of Naming*, 76–77). See the comments in Ademollo, *Commentary*, 259.

66 *Crat.* 422d12–13.

67 *Crat.* 422d2–3.

68 *Crat.* 423e7–9.

into form and phonetic material, and which can thus be seen as *formed names*, and things which are not formed names. Elements – at least elements below the level of the primary names – are not units of sense, they merely *resemble*.

Now, there is one thing about Plato's analysis of the *stoicheia* which would be hard to overemphasize: it is strangely twisted. Plato in fact proposes two different analyses of the elements of the primary names: one presented only theoretically and based on the divisions of letters, divisions of beings and expert application of the former to the latter (424b7–425b5), and a second analysis which is made without this preliminary diairetical work and merely explains the human opinions instead of the truth (425c1–3) which, in Socrates' own words, seem outrageous and absurd or ridiculous (*hybristika kai geloia*).[69] It is only this latter analysis that Socrates carries out tentatively and partially in the passage.

It is particularly difficult to evaluate this double proposition of analysis which, despite being clearly pointed out by Socrates, does not become the subject of a proper reflection on his part. In my view, the fact that Plato distinguishes two analyses of the elements and clearly gives preference to one over the other does not mean that he is not serious about his discovery of *resemblance* as a relation of things and the elements of names. There is no reason to think that he is not serious about the resemblance in the correctly proceeding analysis and therefore it is reasonable to think that he is not taking for complete nonsense the resemblance in the "outrageous" analysis which is the only one exemplified. In this second case, Plato is most probably construing the concept on behalf of all those who in his time are engaged in the etymological enterprise but do not raise the question of its foundation: in Plato's diagnosis they are not able to see the elements properly and observe at the foundation some physical resemblances of movements and positions of organs of vocal expression to inexpertly chosen kinds of beings. I take it that Plato does not want to say that these resemblances do not exist and that they are not somehow reflected in the system of names; he rather wants to indicate that they are merely an unimportant part of the real foundation of the system of names, mere *doxa*, not entirely wrong but depicting just a little and accidental bit of the truth whose import will strangely evaporate when examined from the point of view of conventionalism.

The question certainly should be raised why Plato does not say more about the correct and expert assignment of the elements of names to elements of being. One answer might be that he is serious when he lets Socrates say that he

69 *Crat.* 426b6.

is not able to do so at this point.[70] It might be just an outline of the idea that will be developed in later dialogues. Another answer – perhaps more probable – is that he does not push any further with respect to his purpose in this dialogue. It is very probable that the suggested analysis would cause absolute turmoil in his argumentation because it would show the place of conventionalism much faster than Plato needs to do it here.[71]

However, what does all that have to do with the forms of names? I believe that neither of the two analyses of the elements excludes them. In each of them we follow Plato beyond the investigation of names, lengthily exemplified in the passage of etymologies, into the analysis of the phonetic material. After deciding what the level of primary names is, Plato crosses the border at which it is still possible to observe parts of *logos* as phono-semantic units. The elements of primary names are not formed *names*, or in other words they are not forms of names in the phonetic matter. They are undoubtedly some formed matter but not formed names. Plato is looking at the way this matter is organised so it can serve for the creation of names.

This is indeed a critical point at which the whole idea of forms of names can get lost. The resemblance between the elements of primary names and the elements of being might give an impression of being such a principle that could be sufficient for the revealing relation between names and the *nominata*. In such a case there would be nothing but a system of physical resemblances, built from elements up to their most complex combinations, which would match with different *nominata*. This physically based edifice of sounds would be just one single layer related *directly* to the *nominata*. This way of seeing things would correspond to the initial positions of both Socrates' interlocutors who, in their naive approach, most probably imagined only names and *nominata*. In fact, this understanding of the revealing nature of names would dissolve the borderline between the letters and syllables on the one hand and

70 *Crat.* 425b6–7.

71 Given the way Plato adumbrates the analysis of letters into three groups, it is very probable that the resemblances to highest kinds of beings which would be distinguishable thanks to this analysis would be very far from physical resemblances provided by moving parts of the body. The correct procedure would rather depict resemblances obtained by mutual relations into which would enter particular elements on the one side, and particular kinds of being on the other side. They would be something that could be called structural resemblances. But structural resemblances would rather reveal a very different foundation of primary names than physical resemblances. Basically, they would turn out to be a rational system of differences which would allow one to establish the articulated differences of primary names and further build on them the system of intra-referring names.

names on the other. Names would reveal only through resemblances of their parts and would not be more than their agglomerates.

Now, it is clear that Plato does not see such a far-reaching effect behind the introduction of the principle of resemblance. The best sign of this is the very fact that he distinguishes between the primary names and their elements. Even according to the outrageous and ridiculous analysis, there are letters and syllables on the one side, and the primary names on the other. The former are used for creation of the latter but the latter do not seem to be entirely dependent on the former. The name-giver seems to know what he wants to distinguish from what and uses particular letters as instruments to make these distinctions. His designation as *onomata tithemenos*[72] – which can be rendered as "the one who gives (or inserts) names" – looks, by the way, like a direct reference to the passage about the forms of names where the verb "insert" – *tithenai* – was used to describe the activity of embodying the logically pre-existing forms. The letters and syllables are indeed not "whichever", as they were in the passage about the forms, but there is still a clear difference between the letters and names. Certain mimetic letters appear in certain names which are however not their mere agglomerates but names. Although it might be due to the fact that even the ridiculous analysis is merely started and not completed, the least we can say is that Socrates' particular examples do not abolish the difference between the primary names and the elements and neither, therefore, between *formed names* and their elements.

4.3 *Question: If This Reading Is Right and Socrates' Naturalist Theory of Naming Survives Its Own Development towards the Mimetic Principle, Does It also Survive the Subsequent Attack Aiming Directly against It?*

The answer depends very much on what the attack is really aiming at. I believe that some of the distinctions which have been made in the course of this interpretation allow for giving a correct answer to this latter question. In the series of three arguments (or lines of reasoning)[73] leading towards the adoption of conventionalism at 435c2–d3, Plato obviously attacks the concept of the revealing nature of names based on the *mimetic principle*. Furthermore, he focuses quite naturally on that understanding of the mimetic principle that

72 *Crat.* 426d4–5.

73 With most other interpreters I distinguish arguments (1) about truth and falsehood (429b12–431c3), (2) about the qualitative character of imitation, sometimes also called the "Two Cratyluses argument" (431c4–433b7), and (3) about the function of convention and habit, or the "Sklerotes argument" (433b8–435d3).

was presented in the ridiculous analysis, the only one really exemplified. With the exception of the argument about truth and falsehood,[74] which does not attack the mimetic principle directly but rather contrasts it with another principle in force in the use of names, the arguments of Socrates' re-examination try to show that resemblance – *as it was presented* – is not something which could warrant a really revealing relation between name and *nominatum*; that its nature is imperfect; and, in the end, that the question of its perfection or imperfection does not really matter. The convention that one makes with oneself against the background of the general convention made with other users of a particular name, is sufficient to make a name fulfil its revealing function.[75] Plato is obviously attacking the resemblance-principle in the form in which it supposed letters to be direct imitations of reality. The exact conclusion of this attack, or of this part of the attack coming with the proof for conventionalism, is rather particular. Plato does not crash the principle altogether and pronounces sentences which appear to be in its favour. Nevertheless he does attack it and lets it fall down depriving it of any real interest for the comprehension of what names really are.

The importance of the recognition of the real aim of Plato's attack is probably obvious. The fall of the resemblance-principle does not bury with it the ontology and semantics that Plato introduced in the passage on the forms of names. On the contrary, the disposal of that understanding of the principle of resemblance which put in danger the distinction between names and their elements left the way open for the view that names are some specific formed matter which differs from the mere phonetic elements. If the forms of names are taken to be not some descriptions but that which allows one to distinguish one being from another, there is nothing the resemblance *in the sense Plato presents it in the ridiculous analysis* can contribute to the execution of this function.

But what does Plato's final word about conventionalism mean for the forms of names? He claims that convention is an expedient of the understanding of what people *think of* when they use names.[76] It might seem that forms of names are redundant for this function. Is it so? Not if we do not understand them primarily as definitional descriptions but as parts of the system of differences which as such *can* (and this *can* includes naturally that it may also fail to) trace differences which exist in being. The fact that formed names, reflecting the existence of a stable rational structure, are not independent of the activity

74 *Crat.* 429b12–431c3.

75 *Crat.* 435a2–c10.

76 *Crat.* 434e5–435a3.

of the soul of each user of a name is not that surprising. We may understand it in the sense that forms of names are, as it were, re-embodied again and again in the activities of the souls of the users of names, which is natural if we look at names as parts of speech – and that is what Plato indefatigably and conspicuously reminds us of in this dialogue every now and then.[77]

5 Conclusion

As a conclusion I would like to offer a brief overview of what remains, in my understanding, of Socrates' naturalist theory once conventionalism is accepted.

I believe that Plato offered a view on, so to say, the ontology of name represented in the concept of the form of name, and on the semantics of name, represented by the concepts of revealing or signifying by names and of the inherent power of names. The latter group of concepts is by him developed on the ground of the former concept and neither of the two is abandoned, or at least is not excluded by what Plato says in the rest of the dialogue. To defend this claim was my main purpose here. In the course of the interpretation, however, I made more or less clear my view of other insights which Plato develops in the dialogue. I think we can also say that Plato does not abandon the idea that names understood as lexical units create an intra-referring system, exemplified by him at great length in etymologies; nor, I think, does he abandon the idea that this system is based on some elements that have some *specific relation* to elements of being which could be called *resemblance*. It is difficult to say anything more about these foundations as they would appear in a correctly proceeding analysis, if we were to limit ourselves to this dialogue alone. As for the ridiculous analysis of resemblance, I believe that although Plato shows how insufficient it is as a real foundation of the system of names, he nevertheless does not abandon this one completely either. I think he admits that at the bottom of the phonetic side of *logos* there are some elements which resemble some elements of being even in this 'ridiculous' way, just as later, in the *Timaeus*, he will admit that at the bottom of physical reality are some traces of elements that resemble real being. This kind of resemblance does indeed exist according to him but cannot in itself explain the real resemblance of the structure which is built upon the elements, whether this structure consists in names (as in the *Cratylus*) or in the physical world conceived as *cosmos* (as in

77 Cf. Filip Karfík, "A theory of language between the *Cratylus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*," in this volume, especially the pages 185–186.

the *Timaeus*). Such an explanation presumably needs the correct analysis of elements.

In sum, it seems that quite a bit remains from Socrates' naturalist theory that is presented in the *Cratylus*. If I am right in these claims, and especially in my last claims about Plato's acceptance of the principle of resemblance, even in its different comprehensions, it helps to explain why this dialogue is so puzzling and intriguing at the same time. Different ideas which appear and disappear in the course of the enquiry are not really eliminated but rather evaluated and re-evaluated in order to permit Plato further advances in the directions which he opens in this dialogue.[78]

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CHAPTER 5

Forms and Names

On Cratylus *389a5–390a10*

Anna Pavani

Abstract

In discussing the way "the artisan of names" works, Socrates introduces the puzzling notion of the "*pephykos onoma*" (*Crat*. 389d4–5). What is usually downgraded to a "ghostly name" (R. Robinson) is to be understood within its argumentative context. Within the framework of the "tool analogy", Socrates defines both the *kerkis* (a weaving tool to be identified not with a "shuttle", but rather, as I argue, with a kind of comb) and the name as instruments whose specific function is to differentiate. As the structural and terminological parallels testify, producing a name is presented as strictly analogous to producing a *kerkis*. To refute Hermogenes' conventionalism as unfolded in the first part of the dialogue, Socrates shows that producing a name, just as producing a *kerkis*, entails two non-arbitrary components. There is room for arbitrariness when it comes to the actual choice of the phonetic material and this is the reason why lawgivers from different places can produce names that are equally correct. By contrast, there is no room for arbitrariness for the Ideal Name, which the artisan has to look at, and for the *pephykos onoma*, which the artisan has to put into sounds and syllables. What different concrete names share, if they are to be equally correct, is the same *pephykos onoma*. This does not correspond to a "Platonic Form" nor to a "linguistic type" nor to a "meaning", but rather, as I argue, to a concept.

Keywords

pephykos onoma – *kerkis* – analogy – forms of artefacts – linguistic type – meaning – concept

In the *Cratylus*, in discussing how different names may be equally correct even if they are made of different syllables (389d–390a), Socrates introduces the notion of *pephykos onoma* – what we may provisionally call a "name naturally

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suited".[1] My paper aims to make sense of this notion rather than dismissing it, as many scholars do. For that purpose, I consider crucial the argumentative context in which the *pephykos onoma* appears, i.e. the analogy according to which producing a name is just like producing a *kerkis* – a weaving instrument (389a5–390a10). Contrary to the standard interpretation, I claim that the analogy *does* work. If we take seriously the parallels between both productions, it is possible to account for what Robinson has wrongly called the "ghostly name"[2] and, thereby, to show how naming, which is the underlying issue of the whole dialogue, is supposed to work. I shall proceed as follows: in the first section, I shall discuss the function of the *onoma* and the *kerkis*. In the second section, I shall have a closer look at their strictly parallel productions. A detailed comparison of the latter shall cover the whole of the third section. In the fourth and last section, I shall discuss the crucial role played by the most puzzling element of the analogy, i.e. the *pephykos onoma*.

1 The Function of the *onoma* and the *kerkis*

In order to contextualize the passage in question, it is necessary to first address its backstory. In the first main part of the *Cratylus*,[3] Hermogenes, who has already rejected Protagoras' and Euthydemus' doctrines, has to agree that things (πράγματα) have a stable essence of their own (οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιον) (386e1).[4] Next, he must grant that also the related actions (πράξεις) are performed according to their own nature (φύσις) and not according to our opinion (387a1). After the example of cutting and burning, Socrates shifts to speaking, and, in a second step, to naming as a part (μόριον) of speaking (387c6–7). Since naming, just as cutting, weaving and drilling, possesses a

1 I am very grateful for the sharp comments I received from the participants in the Prague meeting. Furthermore, I owe a particular debt to Laura Marongiu and Giulia Dovico.

It is still highly debated how to translate *onoma* properly, since its meaning is wider than "name", but narrower than "word". As Charles Kahn, points out, it "applies to all denotative or categorematic words in nominalized form". "Language and Ontology in the *Cratylus*," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, ed. Edward Lee, Alexander Mourelatos, Richard Rorty (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), 159. I stick to the standard translation for the sake of familiarity only and sometimes leave *onoma* untranslated.

2 Richard Robinson, "The Theory of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*," in R. Robinson, *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 116.

3 As usually suggested, I divide the dialogue in three parts, one (Socrates' refutation of Hermogenes) before and one (his refutation of Cratylus) after the etymologies-section (391b4–427d3).

4 All citations unless otherwise indicated refer to the *Cratylus*.

proper nature of its own, it must be performed with its own proper tool. The proper tool for naming is defined as follows:

> …a kind of instrument (ὄργανον) that instructs (διδασκαλικόν), that is to say (καὶ), that differentiates the essence (διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας), just as a *kerkis* differentiates the web (ὥσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος). (388b13–c1)[5]

Within this definition of the name, Socrates draws a crucial comparison: just as the *kerkis* differentiates the web so the name differentiates the *ousia*, which I understand as essence, as my translation makes clear.[6] It is noteworthy that both items are said to be tools, whose specific function is to differentiate.

Exploring what it means to use an instrument *well*, Socrates asks whose product (ἔργον) the artisan uses (388c9). Like the weaver and the driller, who use the product of the carpenter and the blacksmith respectively, the teacher (διδασκαλικός) is said to use the product of the coiner of names (ὀνοματουργός). Interestingly, he is also called lawgiver (νομοθέτης).[7] To understand precisely the way the "rarest of the artisans among men" (389a1–3) posits names, Socrates invites Hermogenes to consider the way the carpenter works (389a6). The first portion of the text I am considering (389a5–389d3) addresses the production of the weaving tool to which the name has been compared. This tool deserves a brief digression for the following reasons. Firstly, translating *kerkis* as "shuttle" has been amply demonstrated to be wrong:[8] passing the thread of the weft

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5 Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I prefer to take καὶ as epexegetic more for content than for grammatical reasons: If it were coordinating, the name would have two functions. On the contrary, consistently with the previous argumentation, the name, like any other tool, is identified by a single function. The link to the teaching activity emerges clearly at 388c6–7. For epexegetic καὶ see John Lloyd Ackrill, "Language and Reality in Plato's *Cratylus*," in J. L. Ackrill, *Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 41–2; Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato. A Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 111; Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 45; David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60.

6 See Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 61. See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 111 ff. for an extensive discussion on how to interpret *ousia* in this passage.

7 *Pace* Demand, calling the coiner of names (ὀνοματουργός) "νομοθέτης" is not the "result of a play of words". Nancy Demand, "The Nomothetes of the *Cratylus*," *Phronesis* 20, 2 (1975): 107. For, as Sedley rightly points out (*Plato's* Cratylus, 69), it indicates that the skill of introducing a name by setting down a νόμος is far more than just creating a neologism. On the problem of the historical, semi-mythological or mythological existence of the νομοθέτης see Detlev Fehling, "Zwei Untersuchungen zur griechischen Sprachphilosophie," *Rhenisches Museum für Philologie* 108 (1965).

8 See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 108.

between the threads of the warp is what the shuttle does, but not what the *kerkis* does.[9] Moreover, the identification of the *kerkis* with the shuttle hinders the reader from grasping the *tertium comparationis* on which both the above-mentioned definition and the following passages rely. Among the works of prose,[10] precisely Plato's dialogues play a crucial role for understanding what the *kerkis* is supposed to do. In the *Statesman*, the Stranger distinguishes two kinds of expertise, i.e. that of combination (συγκριτική) and that of separation (διακριτική), and places the differentiation with the help of a *kerkis* among the latter (*Pol.* 281e–282c). In the *Cratylus* itself, shortly before the passage under consideration, Socrates explains that by using a *kerkis* "we divide the weft and the warp which are mixed together" (388b1–2).[11] Thus, it seems more appropriate to consider the *kerkis* as a kind of "comb" used to divide the threads.[12] However, since it is particularly difficult to identify exactly the instrument the *kerkis* is supposed to be, I prefer to merely transliterate the Greek term. For the present discussion, however, it suffices to stress that Plato does not refer to an instrument that interweaves, as the shuttle does, but to one that differentiates, as the repeated occurrences of the verb "διακρίνω" (388b2, b11, and c1) show.[13] Precisely this "differentiating function" is what the two tools have in common.[14]

9 See Mathilde Landercy, "La destination de la κερκίς dans le tissage en Grèce au IVe siècle," *L'Antiquité Classique* 2, 2 (1933): 359.

10 Also the poetic sources suggest that it is wrong to identify the *kerkis* with a shuttle. As Kenneth Dover points out commenting on the *Frogs*, the melody traditionally attributed to the *kerkis*, harmonious sounds like those of a plectrum, can hardly apply to the shuttle. *Aristophanes: Frogs*, edited by K. Dover with Introduction and Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 355. See further Stella Spantidaki, *Textile Production in Classical Athens* (Oxford, Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2016), 99–100.

11 κερκίζοντες δὲ τί δρῶμεν; οὐ τὴν κρόκην καὶ τοὺς στήμονας συγκεχυμένους διακρίνομεν; Only after the weft (κρόκη) is inserted through the warp (στήμων) by the shuttle and beaten by the σπάθη, is it up to the *kerkis* to divide the threads.

12 See Landercy, "La destination de la κερκίς," 362. According to Spantidaki, *Textile Production*, 52 the *kerkis* should be identified with a "pin-beater", i.e. the instrument used to separate the threads and to beat the weft into place. Relying on Aristotle's distinction in *Physics* VII 2, 243b, I hold, as Landercy does, that the latter task was accomplished by the σπάθη. On the contrary, the κέρκισις is a process of separation, as Aristotle indicates. See also *Lys*. 208d.

13 See Plato, *Pol.* 282b7 and c1–2.

14 In that sense, the name differentiates an entity from everything else, much as the *kerkis* differentiates one thread of the warp from other threads.

2 The Production of the Tools

The comparison analyzed above implies that *onoma* and *kerkis* are tools. *Qua* tools they are used to produce something; before they are used, however, they must themselves be produced. In this section, I will explore these preliminary productions. Since Hermogenes is invited to turn to the production of the *kerkis*, if he wants to understand the production of the name, I shall follow the same order and begin with its three-step production.

(i) Socrates starts (389a6–389b7) by asking what (ποῖ) the carpenter looks at (βλέπων) when he produces the *kerkis*. He is said to keep his eye on "such a thing that is naturally fit for combing" (τοιοῦτόν τι ὃ ἐπεφύκει κερκίζειν) (389a7–8). If the *kerkis* breaks, he would then make a new one not by looking at the broken one, but, rather, at the form (εἶδος) he was looking at while making the one he broke. Hermogenes agrees that this form – an issue that will be extensively addressed in the following section – can be called "the thing itself which is a *kerkis*" (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς) (389b5). (ii) In the second step (389b8–c2), Socrates addresses a typology-differentiation, which will turn out to be fundamental for our following discussion. In order to produce a *kerkis* for a thin or thick or linen or woolen garment, the carpenter must simultaneously fulfill two requirements, as the juxtaposition μὲν … δέ at 389b9–c1 suggests: on the one hand, each *kerkis* must have, as previously explained in (i), the *eidos* of the *kerkis*; on the other hand, the carpenter must confer to each product, i.e. to each actual *kerkis* he is going to produce, that nature (φύσις) which is best for the further production of each garment.[15] In other words, the artisan must assign to each particular artefact, which must have the *eidos* of the *kerkis*, the kind of *kerkis* that is naturally adequate for the kind of garment it is supposed to produce. (iii) By focusing on the material the tool must be made of (ἐξ οὗ), Socrates applies to all tools the distinction which he has drawn in the case of the *kerkis* (389c3–d3). After finding out which instrument is naturally fit for each product (i.e. the garment mentioned before), the artisan must put the corresponding instrument into the naturally appropriate material.[16] He must

15 The main textual difficulty consists in the double occurrence of ἕκαστος at 389b10–c1. To avoid misunderstandings between the two products, i.e. the *kerkis* as the product of the carpenter, on the one hand, and the garment which is, in turn, what the *kerkis* produces, on the other hand, I take the first ἑκάστῳ (389b10) as implying something like ἱματίῳ, whereas I take the ἔργον mentioned at 389c1 to be the actual *kerkis* suited for a kind of garment.

16 At 389c5, adding τὸ ἔργον (the reading attested by the families β and δ, which Burnet does not adopt) would confirm my reading, according to which the material is that of the instrument (e.g. the *kerkis*) and not that of the final product (e.g. the garment).

know, for instance, how to put the drill naturally suited to each product into iron (εἰς τὸν σίδηρον). Each kind of *kerkis*, which is suited by nature (πεφυκυῖα) to a certain type of garment, must be embodied in its naturally determined material, i.e. into wood.

By accomplishing the intention declared at 389a5,[17] Socrates turns finally to the name, whose production follows closely the previous case. He states that the lawgiver must know how to put (δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι) "the name naturally suited to each thing" (τὸ ἑκάστῳ φύσει πεφυκὸς ὄνομα) into sounds and syllables (εἰς τοὺς φθόγγους καὶ τὰς συλλαβὰς) (389d4–6).[18] This matches the previous (ii). In correspondence with the previous (i), Socrates explains that the lawgiver must make and give all names by looking (βλέποντα) at "that thing itself which is name" (αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα), "if he is to be an authoritative imposer of names" (389d6–8).[19] Now (389d8–390a3) we turn to (iii): the fact that he does not always embody it into the same syllables is explained with the help of another analogy, which is placed, like in a matryoshka doll, within the bigger one I am considering. Socrates compares the lawgiver to a smith. Different smiths place the instrument naturally suited to each thing into different sorts of iron when producing the same tool (τὸ αὐτὸ ὄργανον) for the same goal (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα). In the same way, different lawgivers place the name naturally suited to each thing into different syllables (389d8–e2). In the second step, Socrates explains that using different chunks (or kinds) of iron would not threaten the success of the process,[20] since the instrument will be correctly produced as long as the artisan gives to it the same form (τὴν αὐτὴν ἰδέαν) (389e3). Socrates closes the smith-analogy by adding that the result would not be compromised if the production occurs in a different location.[21] In the concluding sentence, he summarizes both factors that can differ without threatening the procedure's correctness. As long as the lawgiver puts the

17 As the introducing ἆρ᾽ οὖν at 389d4 indicates, Socrates presents a kind of conclusion.

18 The expression "(A) τὸ ἑκάστῳ (B) φύσει (C) πεφυκὸς (D) ὄνομα" follows closely the previous ones: "τὸ φύσει ἑκάστῳ πεφυκὸς ὄργανον" (BACD) at 389c4, "τὸ φύσει ἑκάστῳ τρύπανον πεφυκὸς" (BADC) at 389c7, and "τὴν φύσει κερκίδα ἑκάστῳ πεφυκυῖαν" (BDAC) at 389c10. "πεφυκός" conveys an inclination because of a thing's own nature. It is noteworthy that the corresponding verb occurred at 386e4. Hermogenes granted that things possess a stable essence, "as it is natural" (ᾗπερ πέφυκεν).

19 Ademollo's rendering of κύριος as "authoritative" rightly conveys that Socrates does not praise a good lawgiver in contrast to a bad one, as Timothy Baxter claims in defending his prescriptive reading of the dialogue. T. Baxter, *The* Cratylus: *Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1992), 44–45.

20 See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 137.

21 At 390a1–2 the anaphoric usage of ἐάντε framed by ὅμως and ἕως marks the "variables" the process admits.

form of the name suited to each thing (τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος εἶδος […] τὸ προσῆκον ἑκάστῳ)[22] into syllables of whatever sort (ἐν ὁποιαισοῦν συλλαβαῖς), there will be no qualitative difference between a lawgiver from "here", i.e. a Greek, and a "Barbarian" one (390a5–9).[23]

Considering the correctness of names – the very topic of the dialogue – neither (a) the actual choice of material nor (b) the lawgiver's provenience counts. He works correctly as long as he handles the fitting material, i.e. *any* sounds and syllables (and not, for instance, any numbers or any musical notes), no matter which linguistic community the lawgiver belongs to. What counts is *his* (and not everyone's) assignment of the *pephykos onoma* to whatsoever syllables.[24]

3 Putting the Pieces Together: The Construction of the Analogy

The passage I have paraphrased in the previous section is known as "the shuttle analogy".[25] Nevertheless, it has been argued that speaking of "analogy" is misleading, since certain parallels between the account of the making of names and of "shuttles" are merely apparent.[26] Furthermore, there are scholars who fail to see how a "shuttle" can be said to "divide".[27] As explained before, however, a *kerkis* is identified precisely by the capacity of differentiation. Others go so far as to claim that it is the huge discrepancy between the two elements that prevents the comparison from working.[28] Such a discrepancy, even if it were as huge as they claim, would not weaken the *legitimacy* of the parallel, because the juxtaposition of different elements is the underlying condition

22 Given the strong connection between natural predisposition and technical adequateness, the adjective προσῆκον (i.e. fitting, appropriate) is consistent with the previous πεφυκός.

23 Usually, scholars underline how surprising Socrates' statement should have sounded to Greek ears. I think that the attribution of equal merit to Greek and Barbarian lawgivers is rather stated for the sake of the argument.

24 With this move, Socrates has already confuted Hermogenes' premise, according to which a word means what the person *using* it *chooses* it to mean.

25 Richard J. Ketchum, "Names, Forms and Conventionalism: 'Cratylus', 383–395," *Phronesis* 24, 2 (1979), 136. It would be more appropriate to speak of the "tool analogy argument" (as Baxter does; *The Cratylus*, 46), since the "shuttle analogy" is a part of a more comprehensive analogy, which starts at 386e.

26 See, e.g., Brian Calvert, "Forms and Flux in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Phronesis* 15, 1 (1970): 28.

27 See, e.g., Ian M. Crombie, *Plato's Doctrines* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963), 477.

28 Richard Robinson considers the argument "weak and fanciful" because of the "deniable assumption that a name is a tool like a shuttle". "A Criticism of Plato's *Cratylus*," in R. Robinson. *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 124–5.

of any analogy. By contrast, such a discrepancy could affect the *validity* of the argument, since the success of any analogy depends on the features the juxtaposed elements are said to share. More precisely, it depends on the grade of relevancy the selected features have. In the present case, it is indisputable that we are dealing with an analogy: according to the standard definition of analogy, Socrates, who acts "for the purpose of explanation or clarification", draws a "comparison between one thing and another" in virtue of a partial similarity.[29] What needs to be shown is that the analogy succeeds, i.e. that the features both elements share *are* distinctive. As I mentioned in the first section, both instruments share the distinctive feature that define them. That they also share "relevant aspects" in the way they are produced, is what this section aims to show. For that purpose, I shall compare both productions by referring to the table in which, for the sake of clarity, I gathered all textual items discussed in the previous section; I shall first deal with the top (i) and the bottom (ii) rows of the table, before turning to the problematic intermediate part (iii).

(i) For their production, the carpenter and the lawgiver must keep their eyes on that thing itself which is *kerkis* and *onoma* respectively (A). Connected to one of the typical verbs of contemplation, i.e. βλέπω, the formula "αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα" (389a7–8) recalls verbatim "αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς" (389b5), of which "τοιοῦτόν τι ὃ ἐπεφύκει κερκίζειν" (389a7–8) culminates. Although both expressions are immediately reminiscent of the well-known Platonic way of conveying the Form of X through "αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν X", scholars tend to reject this possibility beforehand. Some deny *a priori* the presence of the theory of Forms in the *Cratylus*, by locating the dialogue in a certain chronological order;[30] others are keen to consider it highly implausible that a craftsman would contemplate a transcendent Form.[31] Still others feel forced to deflate the strong ontological implications of the terminology, which is indisputably reminiscent of the Theory of Forms, by considering it an "unreliable guide".[32] Finally, yet not surprisingly, the passage's terminology has been regarded with suspicion, since what the carpenter (and analogously the lawgiver) is said to be looking at is the "Form" of an artefact. Much has been written on the discrepancy between

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29 According to the Oxford English Dictionary *ad locum*.

30 Missing the *chorismos* of the *Republic*, scholars like John V. Luce consider the *Cratylus* an early dialogue. "The Date of the *Cratylus*," *The American Journal of Philology* 85, 2 (1964).

31 An obvious objection to this interpretation is the discussion of the Form of couch and the Form of table in *Republic* X. See below.

32 John V. Luce, "The Theory of Ideas in the *Cratylus*," *Phronesis* 10, 1 (1965): 22. Despite noting the importance of this passage in the development of Plato's technical usage, George M. A. Grube claims that "the vocabulary is laboured and the meaning obscure". *Plato's Thought* (London: Methuen & Co Ldt, 1958), 14.

TABLE 5.1 Production analogy

	Production of the “comb” (κερκίς)	Production of the “name” (ὄνομα)
Ideal Model (τὸ εἶδος) (A)	The comb in itself (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς)	The name in itself (αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα)
Suited Instrument (πεφυκὸς ὄργανον) (B)	The comb naturally suited (πεφυκυῖα κερκίς)	The name naturally suited (πεφυκὸς ὄνομα)
Purpose (ἔργον) (C)	Garment (ἱμάτιον): Thin garment (λεπτὸν ἱμάτιον) Thick garment (παχὺ ἱμάτιον) Linen garment (λινοῦν ἱμάτιον) Woolen garment (ἐρεοῦν ἱμάτιον)	
Material (ἐξ οὗ) (D)	Wood (ξύλον)	Syllables (συλλαβαί)
Products (ἔργα) (E)	Combs (κερκίδες)	All names (πάντα τὰ ὀνόματα)

passages like this and *Republic* X, on the one hand, and what we are told of the Forms elsewhere, on the other hand, and a special controversy has arisen over whether Plato countenanced Forms of artefacts. Considering the terminology, the answer seems to have to be affirmative and, thus, completely at odds with Aristotle's notorious report, according to which Plato claimed that there are Forms only of things existing by nature.[33] Since I cannot go into such

33 Notoriously, asking, as Plato's Parmenides does (*Parm.* 130b–e), of what things there are Platonic Forms (see *Met.* III 4, 999a32–b1 and 999b17–20), Aristotle argues in *Met.* XII 3, 1070a18–19 that Plato claimed that there are Forms only of things existing by nature. For something like a house or a ring, we would *not* say that there is a Form (*Met.* I 9, 991b6–7). But *why* does Aristotle report that “they” do not want Forms of artefacts, if this claim seems to be expressed in some dialogues? Commenting on *De ideis* 79,22–80,6, Gail Fine

controversy here, I consider it appropriate to work with the "minimal" agreement to be found in the secondary literature: it has been rightly pointed out that what in all cases is referred to as a "Form" of an artefact is the "model" the artisan is aiming at in his actual construction's procedure. "Something ideal and beyond anything we can see or touch" seems to guide him; a kind of "paradigm of planned outcomes" is his point of reference.[34] However, the "ideal model" is more familiar in the case of the *kerkis* (shape, size, required proportions etc.) than it is in the case of the name. In fact, the only information we have about the name is the function through which it is defined, i.e. its capacity of differentiating the essence.

(ii) The material component and the final products (respectively, (D) and (E) in the chart) are easier to grasp than the ideal model handled above. The terminology employed for the embodiment into the fitting material corresponds in both cases.[35] Furthermore, the text makes clear what the material is: the actual *kerkis* is made of wood just as the name is made of sounds and syllables (D). Socrates' point is that the material the tool is made of is inessential as long as it is suited to its purpose, i.e. to the product being produced (E). In the first case, Socrates mentions an actual product explicitly: it is the broken *kerkis* that remains in the hand of the carpenter while he is making it. In the other case, I believe that "all names" (πάντα τὰ ὀνόματα mentioned at 389d7) are the names Socrates is going to analyze in the etymology section. They are contingent and existing names made of phonetic material, viz. sounds and syllables, which will play a major role in the refutation of Cratylus' mimetic account of language.

(iii) As previously mentioned, the most demanding aspect corresponds to the middle part of the chart, i.e. (B) and (C). In both cases, we encounter a differentiation (C), since every specific purpose (ἔργον) requires a naturally suited instrument (πεφυκὸς ὄργανον) (B). In the case of the *kerkis,* the

argues that, according to Aristotle, Plato does not take Forms of artefacts to have all the features that Aristotle, at any rate, associates with distinctively Platonic Forms (*On Ideas. Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Holding that "one would never guess from Plato's dialogues that artefact Ideas are excluded", Sarah Broadie claims that Platonists rejected Forms of artefacts, since some of their own arguments would have justified assuming them. "Why no Platonistic Ideas of Artefacts?" in *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, ed. Dominic Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 235.

34 Sarah Broadie, "Ideas of Artefacts?" 234. See also *Grg.* 503e.

35 The phrasing δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι (followed by εἰς) at 389d6 equates *expressis verbis* the drill's embodiment into iron at 389c7–8. Besides τίθημι, which occurs at 390e4, Socrates uses the verb ἀποδίδωμι at 389e3 and at 390a7.

differentiation comes after the ideal model, whereas in the case of the name the order is reversed.[36] In the case of the weaving tool, the artisan, who fixes his eyes upon the ideal *kerkis* (A), must consider which kind of garment (ἱμάτιον) the actual *kerkis* (E) is to be suited for. The type of instrument is determined by the garment's type, as the four examples in (C) display. In the case of the *pephykos onoma*, the text lacks examples and any further specification of what its ἔργον is, since the reference of ἑκάστῳ ("each thing" at 389d4) is never made explicit. Precisely the empty cell of the chart will be the topic of the following section.

Consistently, both from a structural and from a terminological point of view, the "ideal model" (A), the type-differentiation (B)-(C), the fitting material (D), and the final products (E) are transferred from the case of the *kerkis* to the name case. The parallels are not "merely apparent" (as Calvert claims), since producing a name is presented as having the same features as producing a *kerkis*. Still, some perplexities might remain.[37] I believe that not every asymmetry needs to be smoothed; on the contrary, a few flaws are tolerable, as long as they do not bear on the analogy's purpose. As mentioned before, Socrates aims precisely to explain the less intuitive phenomenon of naming by pointing to something familiar the interlocutor can easily grasp. However, his main goal is not purely didactic. He consciously chooses a simple case in respect of which his interlocutor is ready to accept something "by nature" without reserve, since he wants to complete the refutation of Hermogenes' view. In fact, Socrates needs only to draw some consequence from what Hermogenes has already granted at 386a–e. It is by leveraging the paradigmatic case of the production of the *kerkis* that he displays even more strikingly that producing a name, *qua* technical process, is irreducible to the bare convention Hermogenes defends.[38]

Nevertheless, an obvious objection to my interpretation could go as follows: given that so little is said about the *pephykos onoma* and given that a small asymmetry does not as such invalidate any analogical argument, why not neglect it? Even some scholars, who consider the analogy to be valid,

36 A likely explanation for this chiasmus is that the *pephykos onoma* connects directly to the last step of the previous argumentation dedicated to the instruments naturally fit for each product.

37 For instance, one could wonder whether the phonetic material can be really compared to wood.

38 The *kerkis* works as a "model" just as the angler in the *Sophist* and the weaver in the *Statesman* do. I thank Prof. Mary Louise Gill for stimulating me to think about this issue.

propose to dispense with it.[39] In what follows, I will argue that this element, the removal of which would compromise the strength of the whole argument, plays a pivotal role in the conception of naming Socrates wants to defend and should therefore not be dismissed.

4 Filling the Gaps: The Analogy Still at Work

As previously mentioned, the main textual puzzle to overcome is the following: the *pephykos onoma* is said to be suited or appropriate "for each thing" and yet the reference of ἑκάστῳ (389d4, 390a7, and 390e3) is never made explicit. Instead of resorting to theoretical elements external to the passage, I propose to rely on the analogy itself. Considering that ἑκάστῳ, in the case of the *kerkis*, picks out kinds of *kerkis* corresponding to types of garment (third row of the chart), I claim that the same must hold for the name as well. In other words, the case of naming also ends up with different kinds of names suited to different products. Since the definition states that the task of the name is to differentiate the essence, and since the end-products are the existing names, we can take actual denominations as sharing the same function, i.e. differentiating the essence in the same way. Since Barbarian and Greek lawgivers are said to work properly, although they employ different phonetic material, we can legitimately infer that the same differentiating function can be accomplished without qualitative difference by names within different languages. Despite wide variation in the phonetic embodiment, they would be equally correct as long as the corresponding *pephykos onoma* is the same. To grasp what Socrates might hint at, I will canvas the three most likely options. For the sake of clarity, I will resort to the example traditionally used in the secondary literature:[40] by assuming that the "essence" we want to deal with is that of Horse, we would claim that the denominations "Pferd" and "hippos" are equally right. What does their rightness depend on? Do they share (i) the same Form, (ii) the same linguistic type, or rather (iii) the same meaning?

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39 Some of them underline that this item is never mentioned again in the dialogue, while others wonder why Socrates does not resort to that element when he would mostly benefit from it. See Ademollo, *Commentary*, 137. On the contrary, scholars like Ackrill argue that the *pephykos onoma* is assimilated by the notion of *dynamis* addressed at 394a–b ("Language and Reality," 43).

40 This example is inspired from Socrates' argument at 385a. However, since Plato does *not* provide any examples, one should proceed with caution.

(i) Starting from the premise that "to show the *ousia* of a thing is to signify its Form", Kahn claims that "the rightness of any particular name is to identify, specify, or signify some particular Form".[41] In our case, "Pferd" and "hippos" would be equally correct as long as they signify the same Form and, in the present case, the Form of Horse. The Proper Form put into sounds and syllables is, according to Gold, the correspondent Form.[42] Focusing on the terminology Plato employs, some scholars argue that the *pephykos onoma* must be a Form, since Socrates calls it *idea* and *eidos*.[43] In the article that had the merit to reopen the debate on this issue, Kretzmann explains that the *pephykos onoma* which is a "translinguistic entity which cannot be identified with any sounds or marks"[44] cannot be a Form for two reasons: (a) the embodiment into letter is completely different from the embodiment into matter and (b) it is inconceivable that a Form could be construed as being a name.[45] Further developing reason (a), Sedley argues convincingly that anyone trying to embody the Form of Horse into matter would in theory be making a particular horse and not the corresponding name.[46] In order to avoid this difficulty, the *pephykos onoma* could be identified with the Form (of Horse) taken exclusively from an epistemological point of view. Unfortunately, this strategy ends up being far too weak an interpretation of what a Platonic Form is supposed to be.

(ii) Alternatively, one could agree with scholars like Bestor and Gold, who identify the *pephykos onoma* with a linguistic "type". By making use of a distinction originally drawn by Pierce, they claim that concrete names like "Pferd" and "hippos" are "tokens" (i.e. particular linguistic units consisting of a string

41 Kahn, "Language and Ontology," 163.

42 Jeffrey B. Gold, "The ambiguity of 'Name' in Plato's 'Cratylus'," *Philosophical Studies* 34 (1978): 238.

43 The *pephykos onoma* is called *idea* within the smith analogy at 389e3 and "the *eidos* of the name suited for each thing" at 390a6–7. Furthermore, the *pephykos onoma* is labelled "*eidos*" in the summary Socrates offers before launching into the etymologies (390d9–e5): he confirms that Cratylus rightly holds that not everyone is a demiurge of names; a demiurge of names is that one alone who looks at the name which belongs by nature to each thing (τὸ τῇ φύσει ὄνομα ὂν ἑκάστῳ) and who can put its *eidos* into letters and syllables (390e2–5). Whereas some variations are fully compatible with the previous passage (there are letters instead of sounds and the artisan of names is called a demiurge), the introduction of ἀποβλέπω, whose analogous βλέπω previously referred to the ideal name, is stressed to defend the claim that the *pephykos onoma* is a Form.

44 Norman Kretzmann, "Plato on the Correctness of Names," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 129. He calls it "the model correct name".

45 Kretzmann, 130.

46 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 82. He denies that they are the Forms of the things named.

of marks or a sequence of sounds) of the same "type".[47] Since these scholars specify that "tokens are of the same type when they have the same meaning,"[48] I think it would be more fruitful to leave aside the linguistic label and test directly the notion of "meaning".

(iii) Indeed, if "the man in the street" – as Aristotle would say – were asked what "Pferd" and "hippos" have in common, he would intuitively answer that they mean the same. In a similar sense, Ackrill distinguishes between ordinary names and "the identical meaning"[49] that they bear. According to him, the *pephykos onoma* is "the meaning of all ordinary names in a group of synonyms"; it consists in "a semantically defined unit," which is "not made of sounds or letters" and which can be called "name-as-concept," "in that what synonyms all express is the same concept."[50] Since existing denominations could discharge the same function in different ways, it is not completely accurate to work with the notion of synonymy.[51] Furthermore, the transition from meaning to concept is, in my view, not as automatic as Ackrill presents it. Or, better yet, it is precisely the sense in which "meaning" and "concept" are interchangeable that should be challenged. Indeed, if understood as definition, "meaning" seems to be necessarily connected to language. This is not the case for what the meaning expresses or represents (i.e. its reference). Since concrete names are what the lawgiver himself brings into existence, a definition would be logically impossible. For, before the lawgiver's intervention, there is no language in which such a definition could be expressed. On the contrary, "meaning" if understood as a non-linguistic reference, seems to be compatible with the task of the lawgiver. Thus, what in all different phonetic embodiments must be the same is the conceptual reference. Socrates' main point against Hermogenes is that the conceptual differentiation is just as given as the garment's differentiation and that the concrete names, like the concrete *kerkides*, should conform to it. Kretzmann's intuition, according to which the *pephykos onoma* is "the correctly framed concept of the Form of the bearers of the actual name,"[52] seems to trace concepts – which are, in my view, the best interpretative option – back

47 Pierce (*Collected Papers*, sec. 4.537). Properly speaking, "hippos" is a different token from "hippos", since tokens are one-time-only units. However, scholars like Thomas W. Bestor claim that "hippos" and "Pferd" can be considered different tokens of the same type in an extensive sense. T. Bestor, "Plato's Semantics and Plato's 'Cratylus'," *Phronesis* 25, 3 (1980): 311.

48 Bestor, 310.

49 Ackrill, "Language and Reality," 44.

50 Ackrill, 44.

51 See Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 84.

52 Kretzmann, "Correctness of Names," 131.

to Forms. Going the other way around, Gold comes to the same conclusion by arguing that to have a share of the Proper Form is to have the corresponding concept.[53]

Although it is indisputable that there must be a connection between Forms and concepts, in this passage they must be distinguished. Even if Socrates does not tell us outright, the exact wording used to describe the lawgiver's *modus operandi* gives us a clear hint: the coiner of names is said to look at the ideal name and to embody the *pephykos onoma* into the phonetic material; he is not said to look at the Form of what he names. In our example, the lawgiver does not look at the Form of Horse, in which the concrete horses partake. To produce the concrete denomination "hippos" (or "Pferd"), he rather puts the *pephykos onoma* of the Horse (which would not yet be called "horse") into some sounds and syllables. At this point, however, a difficulty arises: How should the lawgiver know *what* to place into the phonetic material, if he does not look at the corresponding Form? Then, why not imagine the lawgiver looking at the Form of Name *and* at the Form of the Horse by putting the latter into whatsoever syllables? As I explained while paraphrasing the passage, the lawgiver seems to have only a second-hand knowledge of what he names, although he is said to look at the ideal name (which could be also understood as the Form of Name). Is this asymmetry contradictory? I think that the solution lies in the analogy itself: like any artisan, the lawgiver looks only at the one ideal model of his *techne*. In other words, the contemplation of the Form of what will be named falls outside his field of competence. That is precisely the reason why another specialist, "the one who knows how to ask and answer questions" is introduced (390c10–11). As we apprehend from the following part of the analogy (starting at 390b1), it is not the lawgiver, i.e. the producer, but the dialectician, i.e. the user, who judges the correctness of existing names. This capacity depends on the eidetic knowledge that the coiner of names lacks. For, if the lawgiver could *know* what he names, his linguistic community would have a language that perfectly mirrors the structure of reality. Since the end of the dialogue warns us that we cannot hope to learn the essence of things from their names (439b6–8), I assume that this is not what usually happens. Indeed, there is something we intuitively grasp about our current denominations, which will be further explained in the *Statesman*: some of them are wrong. However, since they succeed in their function, the mistake cannot be attributed to the lawgiver. It is at the level of the *pephykos onoma* that something went wrong. But that is another story.

53 Gold, "The Ambiguity," 239.

By introducing the lawgiver, the philosophical point being made seems to be substantially the following: whereas there is room for arbitrariness in the choice of the phonetic material, what a name aims at, i.e. its function, and what a name names, i.e. its conceptual reference, cannot be arbitrary. Function and conceptual reference are the non-conventional elements of naming Hermogenes has to accept once he has granted that producing a name is analogous to producing a *kerkis*.

5 Conclusions

In this paper, I have analyzed the analogy between the production of the *kerkis* and the production of the name (*Crat.* 389a5–390a10) to determine what the *pephykos onoma* is. Firstly, I have explained how Socrates prepares the way by defining both the *kerkis* (a kind of comb) and the name as tools, and by connecting them through the same differentiating function. By analyzing the structural and terminological parallels, I have shown that the task of the lawgiver is presented as analogous to the task of the carpenter. To refute Hermogenes' conventionalism, Socrates shows that producing a name, just as producing a *kerkis*, entails two "natural" and one "conventional" components. There is room for arbitrary decision when it comes to the actual choice of the phonetic material; that is not the case for (i) the ideal name the artisan has to look at and (ii) the "name naturally suited to each thing" he has to embody. With reference to (ii), I have shown why the most widespread interpretations ("Platonic Form", "linguistic types", and "meanings") fall short of explaining the role of the *pephykos onoma*. Relying on the strength of the analogical argument, I claimed that the *pephykos onoma* should be identified with a concept.

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CHAPTER 6

Platons Theologie der Götternamen

Jakub Jinek

Abstract

The paper claims that the question of the correctness of divine names cannot be resolved by reference to the authority of the poets or by a certain semantic theory, but by turning to metaphysics. Socrates proceeds from revision of beliefs of the poets, through the formulation of the principle of "genetic synonymy", which yet does not apply without exception, to the discovery of the cosmology and the metaphysics of principles hidden behind the theology of the names of the highest divine triad Zeus – Cronus – Uranus. However, it is, on the one hand, the current context of the debate shaped by the Aristophanic comic, and, on the other hand, the decision not to communicate the most important doctrines in the text that prevents Socrates from presenting these teachings explicitly; yet a number of intertextual references and allusions as well as the indirect Platonic tradition can help complete the whole picture.

Keywords

Homer – Aristophanes – genetic synonymy – cosmology – world soul – nous – metaphysics of principles – Platonic indirect tradition – the "doctrine of reserve"

1 Einleitung

Wenn wir im Zusammenhang der Behandlung der Götternamen in der Passage des Dialogs *Kratylos* (391–411) von einer Theologie sprechen wollen, dann müssen wir uns zunächst ihre zwei damaligen Aspekte vergegenwärtigen:

1. Die Theologie war von vornherein eine „Rede von Göttern",[1] die nach den wahren Eigenschaften der Götter und nach der Möglichkeit unserer Kenntnis von ihnen fragt. In diesem Sinne war für sie eine Fragestellung typisch, die

1 Der Begriff θεολογία kommt bei Platon überhaupt zum ersten Mal vor, und zwar in seiner *Politeia* (II 379a5 f.).

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von den Götternamen auf die Beschaffenheit Gottes zu schließen suchte. Seit ältesten Zeiten ging die theologische Reflexion von der Vorstellung eines engen Zusammenhangs zwischen dem Namen und dem Charakter des Benannten aus. In der klassischen Epoche wurde diese Disziplin in Anschluss an Poeten, mit Homer und Hesiod an der Spitze, betrieben. Ihre Protagonisten waren Denker desjenigen Typus, der in unserem Dialog durch die mehrmals erwähnte Gestalt Euthyphrons repräsentiert (und in dem gleichnamigen platonischen Dialog ausdruckvoll geschildert) wird. In den einschlägigen Diskussionen tauchte wohl bereits damals die Frage nach der Richtigkeit der Namen auf,[2] die im Dialog *Kratylos* von Sokrates zum expliziten Thema gemacht wurde.

2. Die Theologie kann daneben auch als eine rationelle Untersuchung der Wirklichkeit verstanden werden, deren höchster Stufe das Adjektiv „göttlich" (θεῖος) zugesprochen werden kann.[3] Sie behandelt das Göttliche als einen adäquaten Namen für ein metaphysisches Prinzip und bemüht sich, die Rede von Göttern in eine philosophische Prinzipienlehre umzuwandeln. Im Bezug auf die Götternamen unterscheidet sich diese Disziplin von der traditionellen Onomastik dahingehend, dass sie versucht, die wahre Realität hinter dem Benannten zu erforschen; zu den überlieferten Namen selbst stellt sie sich entweder ablehnend, oder revisionistisch.

Sokrates im Dialog *Kratylos* scheint zwar beide genannten Aspekte der Theologie zu verwenden, wobei allerdings der letztere allmählich überwiegt.[4] Diese Tendenz lässt sich schon in der überhaupt ersten theologischen These des Dialogs beobachten, die das Forschungsinteresse von der Frage nach den Richtigkeit der Götternamen zu der nach dem Wesen der Götter selbst verschiebt, indem sie besagt, dass es die Götter sind, die „vollkommen richtig die Namen beilegen" (391d8). Im Folgenden soll gezeigt werden, dass sich Platon auf die Topik der Richtigkeit der Götternamen nur deshalb stützt, um seine eigene philosophische Agenda zu verfolgen. Deswegen ist seine Theologie der Götternamen primär eher eine philosophische Theologie als eine Theorie der Sprache. Die Sprache stellt für ihn nur eine der vielen Sphären dar, in denen dieselben metaphysischen Prinzipien zur Geltung kommen können.

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2 Siehe David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75–78.

3 Vgl. Empedokles *DK* 31 B 29, B 31; Diogenes von Apollonia *DK* 64 B 5, B 7; Platon, *Resp.* VI 500c9, VII 517d4; Aristoteles, *Met.* XI 7, 1064a36–b1; XII 7, 1072b14–30.

4 Sokrates also scheint denselben Weg wie in der *Politeia* zu betreten, wo er den Gottesbegriff in seine Metaphysik integriert, indem er die Grundsätze der richtigen „Theologie" auf die Idee des Guten anwendet (*Resp.* VI 505a, 509b). Diese Grundsätze sind, dass ein Gott (vgl. den folgerichtig benutzten Singular) unveränderlich sowie gut und als solcher Ursache aller guten Dinge ist (*Resp*. II 376c–383c). Vgl. Michael Bordt, *Religion und Rationalität von Homer bis Aristoteles*, in *Religion und Rationalität*, Hrsg. Johannes Herzgsell, Janez Percic (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011), 30–31.

Zunächst aber noch eine Vorbemerkung: Jede Interpretation der metaphysischen Inhalte des *Kratylos* muss sich mit der Tatsache auseinandersetzten, dass der ganze Dialog von einer starken Komik durchdrungen ist, also mit dem Zwiespalt zwischen Witz und Ernst arbeitet. Dieser Zwiespalt kann einerseits als verständlich betrachtet werden, insofern die Sprache, die das Hauptthema des Dialogs bildet, von der fundamentalen Spannung in der Wirklichkeit betroffen wird, die sich in den klassischen platonischen Dichotomien wie etwa Meinung und Wissen, Aisthêsis und Noêsis oder auch φαῦλα und τιμιώτερα (*Phdr.* 278c–e) widerspiegelt. Andererseits stellt es sich jedoch für den Leser äußerst schwierig dar, zwischen dem ernst Gemeinten und dem nur literarisch Spielhaften eindeutig zu unterscheiden, woraus sich bisweilen erhebliche Interpretationsprobleme insbesondere im Hinblick auf die zahlreichen Etymologien, aus denen ja der Dialog besteht, ergeben.

Es handelt sich hier zudem um eine *aristophanische* Komik, die sich durch eine explizite Erotik auszeichnet, die auf den modernen Leser nahezu obszön wirken mag.[5] Der ganze Dialog wird durch die Frage eröffnet, inwieweit der Gesprächspartner von Sokrates Hermogenes dem Gott Hermes ähnelt (383b, 384d), wobei im Hintergrund die ithyphalische Natur der Gottheit steht.[6]

Es ist allerdings gerade diese erotische Thematik, die einen festen Anhaltspunkt für die Unterscheidung zwischen Komik und Ernst im Dialog bieten kann. Es besteht nämlich ein sachlicher Zusammenhang der phallischen Symbolik mit zwei philosophisch gewichtigen Fragen: mit der der Zeugung und Entstehung (γένεσις), die von Platon nicht nur biologisch, sondern auch metaphysisch verstanden wird,[7] und mit der der Zielrichtung aller Dinge auf das Obere und Göttliche.[8]

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5 Eine in Einzelheiten ausgezeichnete (obwohl in Gesamtdarstellung m. E. nicht ganz korrekte) Analyse dieser Komik bietet Shane Montgomery Ewegen, *Plato's* Cratylus. *The Comedy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

6 Auf explizite Weise (obwohl immer in einer spielerischen Zweideutigkeit) in *Crat.* 429c1–2: Ἑρμογένει τῷδε πότερον μηδὲ ὄνομα τοῦτο κεῖσθαι φῶμεν, εἰ μὴ τι αὐτῷ Ἑρμοῦ γενέσεως προσήκει, ἢ κεῖσθαι μέν, οὐ μέντοι ὀρθῶς γε; („Sollen wir sagen, dieser Name ist unserem Hermogenes hier gar nicht beigelegt, wenn ihm nämlich nichts vom Geschlecht Hermes' zukommt? Oder er ist ihm zwar beigelegt, jedoch nicht aufrecht?" Die Zweideutigkeit betrifft besonders die Wörter γένεσις, ὀρθῶς und κεῖσθαι, wobei die Letzteren zwei entgegengesetzte Zustände des Ersteren darstellen können.)

7 Vgl. γένεσις εἰς οὐσίαν (Werden zum Sein), *Phil.* 26d7–9. Dies ist keine rein platonische Erfindung. Schon bei Hesiod stellt die Tatsache der Zeugung ein Bindeglied der Hierarchie der Gottheiten dar, die die sinnvolle und theoretisch abstrakte Verbindung der ganzen Wirklichkeit gewährleistet. Gerade im *Philebos* wird die Zeugung mit einer Göttin assoziiert (12b–c), die die Personifikation der Verbindung von Grenze und Unbegrenztem, also der dritten Gattung darstellt (25e).

8 Es sei bemerkt, dass der Unterschied zwischen dem Ernsten und dem Komischen im Dialog etwa dem Unterschied zwischen der produktiven und der unproduktiven

2 Homerische Namen

Platons Ausgangspunkt ist insofern traditionell, als er bei der Homerexegese ansetzt.[9] Homers *Ilias* wird ein sprachphilosophisches Prinzip entnommen, laut dem die Richtigkeit der Benennung von dem Wert des Namensgebers abhängt – dies geht auf die früher vorgelegte semantische Theorie zurück, die die Gestalt des Onomatourgos entdeckt und ihm den Titel „Gesetzgeber" zugeschrieben hat (388e–390e). Aus Sokrates' Homer-Interpretation ergeben sich nun zwei Gegensätze zwischen den Namensgebern: der zwischen Göttern und Menschen (391d4–6) und – analog auf der menschlichen Ebene (s. ἀνθρωπινώτερον, 392b4) – zwischen Männern und Frauen, und zwar jeweils mit dem Vorrang des ersten Gliedes.

Beide Unterscheidungen erweisen sich jedoch für die Frage der Richtigkeit der Benennung als höchst problematisch. Wenn im ersten Fall die offensichtlich kontingenten Benennungsvarianten diverser banaler Gegenstände[10] auf den Unterschied zwischen Menschen und Göttern übertragen und somit pompös für „etwas Heiliges" (σεμνόν τι, 392a1) ausgegeben werden, wirkt es im höchsten Maße ironisch. Vor allem aber steht die These vom Primat der homerischen Götter als Namensgeber in Widerspruch dazu, dass gerade in den *Ilias*-Stellen, in denen die genannten Namensunterschiede auftauchen, den Göttern aus moralischer Sicht enorm problematische Handlungen zugeschrieben werden: Entweder lügen sie (*Il.* 14, 291), oder sie streiten miteinander

Wirkung des Eros entspricht, wobei der produktive Eros – genauso wie bei der bekannteren Erörterung des gleichen Themas im *Symposion* (210a–211c) – sich gerade durch die Orientierung auf das Höhere und Bessere ausweisen kann.

9 Dies kommt an der dramaturgisch gewichtigen Stelle des Dialogs vor, wenn Sokrates zunächst die bisherige „gemeinsame Untersuchung" zusammenfasst (der Name habe „von Natur eine gewisse Richtigkeit, und nicht jeder versteht es, ihn irgendeinem Dinge zugehörig beizulegen", 391a), und über die Richtigkeit der konkreten Namen sich nun von den anderen belehren lassen möchte. Da aber die „richtigste der Überlegungen" (ὀρθοτάτη τῆς σκέψεως, 391b9), d. h. für Geld sich von den Sophisten wie Protagoras belehren zu lassen, für Hermogenes aus finanziellen Gründen ausgeschlossen ist, schlägt Sokrates eine volksnähere Lösung vor: sich von Homer und anderen Poeten belehren zu lassen (391c f.). Folgende Homer- und Hesiod-Exegese ist also als eine – ironisch travestierte – „Zweite Fahrt" (δεύτερος πλοῦς; vgl. *Phd.* 99c9 f.) entworfen.

10 Fluss: Xanthos – Skamanthos; Vogel: χαλκίς – κύμινδις (vgl. Aristophanes, *Av.* 1181); Hügel: Batieia – Myrinê. Die Banalität der Unterscheidung erinnert an Sokrates' übliche Hinweise auf „seinen Lehrer" Prodikos (*Crat.* 384b4; *Meno*, 96d7), den Urheber verschiedener – und aus der platonischen Sicht ganz unbedeutender – Wortdistinktionen (*Euthyd.* 277e4; *Charm.* 163d4; *Meno*, 75e3).

(*Il.* 20, 67 ff.). Dieser Verslust an Autorität erinnert dabei an die Kritik der dichterischen Theologie im II. Buch der *Politeia*, in dem gerade diese Eigenschaften Gott entnommen werden.[11]

Der zweite homerische Gegensatz zwischen Frauen und Männern scheitert erstens an der fehlenden Glaubwürdigkeit der Konstruktion, es seien die Männer, die Hektors Sohn „Astyanax“ nennen, während die Weiber „Skamandrios“.[12] Diese Gegenüberstellung, die auf einem pauschalen Urteil über Frauen als Geschlecht beruht,[13] das der – wahrscheinlich authentischen – sokratisch-platonischen Position im V. Buch der *Politeia* widerspricht (V 456a–b), scheint eher zum Arsenal der aristophanischen Komik zu gehören, die mit dem Unterschied zwischen Männern und Frauen als mit einem kontradiktorischen Gegensatz arbeitet.[14] Darüber hinaus beruht dieses Urteil auf einem Fehler, der der unrichtigen Erinnerung des homerischen Textes entstammt, also einer „Todsünde“ für jeden Hermeneus: In Wahrheit ist Hektor selbst der Autor des Namens Skamandrios.[15]

Wenn Sokrates anschließend die Frage nach dem Grund (διὰ τί, 392d11) der Richtigkeit der Alternative Astyanax stellt, so macht er damit deutlich, dass er selber das Männer-Frauen-Kriterium für nicht ganz tragfähig hält. Der gesuchte Grund wird – mit Hilfe eines Zitats aus *Ilias* (22, 507) –, darin gefunden, dass der Knabe als „Stadt-Herrscher“ (Ἀστυάναξ), d. h. als Herrscher (ἄναξ) dessen (τούτου, d. h. der Stadt, ἄστυ) (392e2–3) genannt werden kann, was sein Vater (Hektor) beschützte. Soll dies bedeuten, dass die Herrschaft über die Stadt dem Sohn als Erbe aufgrund der Verdienste des Vaters zukommt (unabhängig davon, wie sich der Sohn selber verhalten wird)? Sokrates' Interpretation zufolge scheint Homer mehr sagen zu wollen. Er gab beiden Männern zwei

11 Platon, *Resp.* 376c–383c; vgl. oben, Anm. 4.

12 Sokrates behauptet, in Übereinstimmung mit Hermogenes, dass der Name Astyanax richtiger zu sein scheint, was er mithilfe folgender Argumentation begründet: (1.) Die Vernünftigeren können richtiger Namen beilegen als die weniger Vernünftigen (φρονιμωτέρους ἢ τοὺς ἀφρονεστέρους, 392c3–4); (2.) die Männer in der Stadt sind vernünftiger als die Frauen, und (3.) der Name Astyanax wird von „den Troern“ (ὑπὸ τῶν Τρώων) benutzt, also von Männern, der Name Skamandrios dagegen „wohl von den Weibern“.

13 Neben dieser pauschalen Voraussetzung – in der vorangehenden Anm. unter (2.) – ist auch die wörtliche Auslegung des Namens „die Troer“ als „die Männer aus Troia“ (oben unter 3.) für die Unglaubwürdigkeit des gesamten Arguments verantwortlich.

14 Vgl. Aristophanes, *Eccl.* 214–228, 441–454.

15 S. Homer, *Il.* 6, 402 f.; vgl. 12, 506. Die Tatsache, dass Hektor, also ein Mann, Urheber eines unrichtigen Namens ist, kann als ein indirekter Hinweis auf die ständige Gültigkeit der sokratisch-platonischen These über die Gleichwertigkeit beider Geschlechter im Bezug auf die intellektuellen Voraussetzungen gelesen werden.

Namen, die man beide mit dem Adjektiv „königlich“ assoziieren kann, weil sie fast dasselbe bedeuten: Herrscher (ἄναξ) und Inhaber (ἕκτωρ) (*Crat.* 393a–b).[16] Dies scheint darauf zu gründen, dass man vom Sohn dasselbe erwarten darf, was der Vater geleistet hat.[17]

Es ist aber bemerkenswert, dass Hektor und sein Sohn gerade in der Hinsicht, die für die richtige Namenübertragung als entscheidend angegeben wurde, gescheitert sind. Sie haben die Stadt nicht gerettet, und folglich waren sie auch nicht imstande, sie auf Dauer in Besitz zu nehmen.[18] Ihre Namen stehen ihnen also, rein sachlich gesehen, nicht zu. Obwohl Sokrates keinen expliziten Vorbehalt gegenüber Homer äußert, offenbart seine Homer-Exegese ganz eindeutig die Schranken der Poeten-Weisheit. Die homerischen Namen mögen im Grunde wahr sein; sie benötigen jedoch eine richtige Interpretation, so wie der Dichter auf die Hilfe des philosophischen Hermeneus angewiesen ist.[19]

3 Genetische Synonymie

Als Ausgangspunkt einer solchen Interpretation kann die im weiteren Verlauf des Dialogs angesprochene Frage gelten, unter welchen Bedingungen ein Wesen, das von einem anderen stammt, mit demselben Namen bezeichnet werden kann. Sokrates transponiert diese Frage in ein Prinzip, das wir als Prinzip der Synonymie der natürlichen Nachfolge der Gattungen – oder kurz: Prinzip der

16 Tatsächlich spricht Homer in den von Sokrates besprochenen Versen beiden Männer sogar nur einen, den wortgleichen Namen „Astyanax“ zu (*Il.* 20, 500, 506).

17 Wenn es sich dagegen nur um die Frage der Erbschaft aufgrund der Vaterverdienste handelte, wäre die Gleichbenennung überflüssig.

18 Darüber hinaus wird die Argumentation in diesem Punkt durch eine hintergründige obszöne Komik stark betroffen. Der erste Teil des Namen Astyanax kann auch wohl vom vulgären griechischen Verb στύω, erigieren (vgl. Aristophanes, *Achar.* 1220; *Av.* 557, 1255; *Lys.* 598, 989, 996), abgeleitet werden, das zusammen mit dem Alpha privativum als „Mannesschwäche“ verstanden werden, und Astyanax dann als „Herrscher der Impotenz“ ausgelegt werden könnte. Vgl. Ewegen, *Plato's* Cratylus, 103 f. Vgl. auch die zweideutigen Hinweise „darauf“, „worüber jemand Herr ist“ und „was er auch hält“ (392e7, 393a7–8); wenn dabei die Rede von der Erbschaft zwischen Vater und Sohn ist, die eben die Zeugungsfähigkeit voraussetzt, ist die komische Wirkung enorm. Hinter der Komik steckt jedoch eine ernste Mitteilung: da weder Hektor noch Astyanax den Krieg überstanden haben, kann von ihnen keine Genealogie stammen – ihre Impotenz ist somit eine Tatsache.

19 Vgl. Platon, *Leg.* VII 811c–e, 817a–d.

genetischen Synonymie – bezeichnen können:[20] Eine konkrete Benennung kann dann „vererbt" werden, wenn das Benannte ein natürlicher Abkömmling einer Gattung der natürlichen Wesen ist.[21] Mit diesem Prinzip verlassen wir die Sphäre des Poetischen; seine philosophische Relevanz für den Bereich der natürlichen Geschöpfe ist evident – und es ist gerade dieser Kontext, in dem auch Aristoteles dieses Prinzip aufgreift.[22] Sokrates erweitert dessen Gültigkeit auf alles (vgl. καὶ τἆλλα ἅπαντα, 393c5), und fasst es somit als ein kosmologisches Prinzip auf.

Gewagter ist aber die weitere Übertragung dieses Prinzips auf das politische Feld; Sokrates behauptet nun, dass nach demselben Prinzip (κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον) der Abkömmling eines Königs auch König genannt werden soll (393c9 f.). Eine solche These ist an sich natürlich schwer akzeptierbar, da das Erbe des Herrschaftstitels offensichtlich auf anderen Faktoren gründet, als dies im Falle der natürlichen Nachfolge der Gattungen ist: der König zeugt zwar Kinder, er tut das jedoch nicht *qua* König, sondern *qua* Mensch. Sokrates warnt deswegen seinen Gesprächspartner davor, sich von ihm täuschen zu lassen (393c8 f.). Und gleich darauf fügt er eine wichtige Präzisierung hinzu: Bei der Namenübertragung geht es nicht so sehr um Silben und Buchstaben (393d1, 3; vgl. 394b4–6), also, aristotelisch gesprochen, um das materielle Substrat der Bedeutung (vgl. σημαίνει),[23] „so lange nur das Wesen des Dinges Kraft hat sich durch den Namen zu offenbaren" (ἕως ἂν ἐγκρατὴς ᾖ ἡ οὐσία τοῦ πράγματος δηλουμένη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι, 393d3–4).[24] Es ist also das Wesen (οὐσία), das für die identische Benennung zweier Sachen verantwortlich ist; somit scheint es wohl eine ähnliche Rolle wie die Natur (τὴν φύσιν, 393c1) bei der Nachfolge der natürlichen Geschöpfe zu spielen.[25]

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20 Vgl. Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato. A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160. Wenn hier von Synonymie die Rede ist, dann ist damit keinesfalls reine Sprachproblematik gemeint; vielmehr handelt es sich um Synonymie in dem klassischen Sinne, wie sie etwa von Aristoteles in *Cat.* 3 behandelt wird.

21 τοῦ γένους ἔκγονον τὴν φύσιν, 393c1. Beispiele hierfür sind Löwen, Pferde, Stiere, Menschen, Bäume.

22 Aristoteles, *Met.* VII 7–9.

23 Die Nebensächlichkeit des materiellen Substrats (im Vergleich mit der Priorität des Eidos oder der Idee, 389b3, e3) für die Frage der Richtigkeit des Namens wurde schon 389d8–390a2 aufgezeigt.

24 Diese genaue Formulierung bildet einen Beitrag zur früher besprochenen semantischen Theorie, die zwischen dem Namen und dem Sein des Benannten unterschieden hat (388b–390a), und damit auch zum Verständnis der bipolaren Wirklichkeit als solcher.

25 Die Übertragung des Prinzips der genetischen Synonymie auf die Gestalt des Königs und damit die Erweiterung von dessen Wirkungsfeld außerhalb der Sphäre der natürlichen

Worin also besteht die Identität des Wesens des Königs und seines Sohnes, ihre gleiche „Natur“, die ermöglicht, auch den Namen zu vererben? Homer zufolge bestand sie in dem Verdienst um die Stadt, und Sokrates scheint nun – allerdings im philosophischen Kontext – in eine ähnliche Richtung zu zielen. Seine Parallelisierung des Königs mit dem guten und schönen Menschen (ἐκ βασιλέως βασιλεύς, καὶ ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ ἀγαθός, καὶ ἐκ καλοῦ καλός, 394a2–3) deutet darauf hin, dass es sich um die innere „Natur“ handelt im Sinne von Arete. In dieser Form ist die Frage nach der Übernahme des Königstitels wesentlich reflexiver gestellt als am Anfang: es handelt sich nun darum, ob im Fall der Bewahrung derselben ethischen und politischen „Natur“ (der Arete) auch der jeweilige politische Titel (König) bewahrt werden kann.

So gelangt Sokrates zu einer Frage, die in der zeitgenössischen politischen Diskussion häufig gestellt wurde und auch sehr umstritten war. Den klassischen Denkern war die Schwierigkeit der Vererbung der guten Charaktereigenschaften des Herrschers auf seine Kinder sehr gut bekannt.[26] Für Platons Sokrates ist nun aber die Möglichkeit der Übertragung höchst wichtig, wenigstens als eine Hypothese, denn sie bekräftigt das Prinzip der genetischen Synonymie in seiner allgemeinen kosmologischen Anwendung (vgl. auch hier: καὶ τἆλλα πάντα, 394a3, ähnlich wie in 393c5). Dadurch wird es für Sokrates möglicht, dieses Prinzip später metaphysisch zu deuten; so fasst er die bisherige Argumentation in eine neue Formulierung des Prinzips zusammen: „Das naturgemäß entstandene also muss auch denselben Namen empfangen.“[27]

Trotzdem macht Sokrates bereits hier deutlich, dass dieses Prinzip nicht ausnahmslos gelten muss. Er erwähnt wiederholt den Fall, dass die Übertragung

Gattungen ist nichts anderes als die Umsetzung eines Arguments, das Sokrates nun hinzufügt. Das Prinzip der genetischen Synonymie kann nämlich auf die Namen angewendet werden, welche die Natur der Buchstaben offenbaren. Die Natur vom βῆτα wird von den Namen der anderen Buchstaben her aufgezeigt, und zwar so, dass seine Bestandteile ἦτα, ταῦ und ἄλφα als Elemente der jeweils komplexeren Buchstaben verstanden werden können: so wie das Bêta aus Êta entsteht, entsteht auch dieses aus Tau und Tau wiederum aus Alpha. Man kann also auch bei den Stoicheia der Sprache eine natürliche Reihenfolge der „Schöpfung“ beobachten, bei der gilt, dass das Komplexere aus dem Elementaren entsteht, dessen natürlicher „Abkömmling“ es ist. In diesem Vorgehen erblickt man das analoge Vorgehen der Elementarisierung in der platonischen Dialektik. Vgl. auch 424b ff. und Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons* Kratylos (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1974), 81–85, 107–110.

26 Platon, *Meno*, 93c–94e; *Prot.* 324d–328d; vgl. *Leg.* III 695e–696a; Aristoteles, *Pol.* 1286b22–27; vgl. 1285b14–22.

27 394d2–3: Τοῖς μὲν δὴ κατὰ φύσιν γιγνομένοις τὰ αὐτὰ ἀποδοτέον ὀνόματα.

der Natur nicht gelingt und die Zeugung auf eine Missbildung (τέρας, 393b9, 394a4, 394d9) hinausläuft. In diesem Fall muss dem Abkömmling, der eigentlich einer anderen Gattung angehört, ein unterschiedlicher Name beigelegt werden (394d). Der Ausdruck τέρας kann jedoch außer dem engen biologischen Kontext auch „Wunder“ bedeuten, d. h. eine positive Ausnahme. Von einer solchen Ausnahme innerhalb der Gattung „Mensch“ ist in mehreren Dialogen die Rede: es ist der dialektische Philosoph, dem der Titel „göttlich“ zukommt,[28] und dessen Figur auch von der oben erwähnten semantischen Theorie vorausgesetzt wird (390c–d). Dass eine Abweichung von der (normalen) menschlichen Natur im Zusammenhang der richtigen Benennung relevant ist, zeigt auch eine spätere Stelle. Sie besagt, im engen Anschluss an die erwähnte semantische Theorie, dass die richtigsten Namen der stabilsten und immer fortbestehenden Dinge von der „göttlicheren als der Menschen Kraft“ festgesetzt worden sind (397b–c).

4 Götternamen

Die bisherige Argumentation wird im weiteren Verlauf des Dialogs auf die königliche Genealogie von Orestes und seinen Vorfahren, samt den Göttern, angewandt. Sokrates behauptet zwar, dass ihre Namen richtig vergeben worden seien, jedoch das Prinzip der genetischen Synonymie gilt bei ihnen zunächst keineswegs: Jeder weiteren Generation (Tantalos – Pelops – Atreus – Agamemnon – Orestes) eignet ein eigener Name und eine eigene Natur und die Eigenschaften werden nicht weitergegeben. Da die Namen zugleich vom bloßen Zufall oder von den Dichtern beigelegt wurden,[29] können auch die Etymologien nicht als ganz sicher gelten; und in der Tat grenzen sie manchmal an Komik (vgl. z. B. Tantalos als „der Hängende“, 395d).

Die Situation ändert sich wesentlich beim Übergang zu den Göttern (395e). Zwar verfolgt Sokrates formal gesehen nur weiter dieselbe mythische Genealogie, aber die genetische Nachfolge von drei Gottheiten, von Zeus – Kronos – Uranos, unterscheidet sich dennoch von den vorigen wesentlich, sowohl durch die Zuverlässigkeit ihrer Benennung, als auch durch die tatsächliche Übertragung der Natur vom Vater auf den Sohn. Dass diese

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28 *Resp.* VI 497c1–3, 500d1, vgl. 492e5, VII 540c2; *Tim.* 90a5–b1; *Epist.* VII, 340c3; *Soph.* 216b9–c2; *Leg.* XII 951b5, 966d1.

29 ἡ τύχη τῆς φήμης, 395e4–5; 394e.

Götter-Etymologien durchaus ernst gemeint sind, lässt sich dabei leicht intertextuell begründen – wenigstens für Kronos und Uranos.[30]

Zeus ist mehr als ein Name – es ist eine Bestimmung (λόγος),[31] die nur „von uns" in zwei Onomata zerlegt wird: Zeus oder Dis, wobei sich Einige der einen, Andere der anderen Namenshälfte bedienen. Wenn aber ins Eine gesetzt,[32] offenbaren uns die beiden Namenshälften die Natur des Gottes.[33] Denn Natur ist das, worauf sich die Dualität der Benennung einigt.[34]

Beide „Namenshälften", die dem Logos zu entnehmen sind,[35] repräsentieren zwei Aspekte dieser Natur: Die Ursache (δι᾽ ὅν) und das Leben (ζῆν). Die Ursache allen Lebens ist also ein Aspekt der Natur von Zeus. Das Leben ist dagegen das Verursachte. Zeus' Natur, die dem Logos gleich ist und die sich in seinen zwei Namen offenbart, scheint also sowohl die Ursache als auch das Verursachte zu integrieren. In der platonischen Kosmologie finden wir eine Entität, die Ursache allen Lebens ist und zugleich das Verursachte, was im gewissen Sinne Alles einschließt – es ist die Weltseele.[36] Ihre Assoziierung mit Zeus dem König ist dabei Platon nicht unbekannt (*Phil.* 30c–31a).

Die Fortführung der Vater-Sohn-Genealogie zeigt, dass Zeus „Abkömmling einer großen Verstandeskraft ist" (μεγάλης τινὸς διανοίας ἔκγονον, *Crat.* 396b5). Diese Bezeichnung trifft zu, denn – wie die Erörterung des Namens seines Vaters weiter zeigt – „Kronos"[37] bedeutet Reinheit und Ungetrübtheit der Vernunft (σημαίνει … τὸ καθαρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ, 396b6–7).

Auch Kronos stehen also zwei Namen zu: Als Erzeuger der (Welt)Seele ist er Dianoia, an sich ist er aber der reine Nous. Die richtige Nomenklatur stimmt nicht nur mit dem Wesen des Benannten, sondern auch mit der richtigen

30 Vgl. *Leg.* IV 714a; und Papyrus Derveni (dazu siehe Vojtěch Hladký, *Papyrus Derveni*, Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2012; Barbara Anceschi, *Die Götternamen in Platons Kratylos. Ein Vergleich mit dem Papyrus von Derveni*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007); *Resp.* VI 509d.

31 Logos ist in der ontologischen Sprach- und Wahrheitstheorie des *Sophistes* als Gegensatz zu ὄνομα aufgefasst (*Soph.* 218b–c). Die Gestallt des Gottes Zeus verbindet also die Oberfläche mit dem Wesen, Außen mit Innen.

32 Denn das Wesen eines Namens ist es, eins zu sein (ἓν ὂν τὸ ὄνομα, 396b2–3).

33 396a4–5: συντιθέμενα δ᾽ εἰς ἓν δηλοῖ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ θεοῦ.

34 Die Verbindung beider Aspekte wird als „Zusammenstellung ins Eine" (συντιθέμενα εἰς ἕν, 396a4–5) aufgefasst.

35 Der ganze Logos klingt etwa folgendermaßen: „der, durch welchen allen Lebendigen das Leben zukommt" (δι᾽ ὃν ζῆν ἀεὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ζῶσιν ὑπάρχει, 396b1–2).

36 Siehe *Leg.* X 896a ff.; *Tim.* 30c ff.

37 Obwohl er es nicht explizit sagt, sieht Sokrates hinter diesem Namen wohl den Genitiv κοροῦ νοῦ, „der reinen Vernunft"; vgl. David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91.

Genealogie überein: Im Namen „Dianoia“ verbindet sich das Wesen von Vater und Sohn, genauer: das Wesen des Vaters (Nous) bindet sich an den Teil-Aspekt des Wesens des Sohnes (Dia-). In diesem Sinne besteht zwischen Vater und Sohn eine Einheit. Im Wirkungsfeld dieser Einheit treten die Namen ganz in den Hintergrund: Die einschlägigen Wörter drücken das Wesen der Gottheit unmittelbar aus.

Auch im Falle von Kronos ist seine kosmologische Rolle aus den anderen Dialogen gut bekannt: er ist die erzeugende demiurgische Vernunft. Die Richtigkeit der „Namen“ beider Gottheiten ist durch den genetisch-synonymen Zusammenhang gegeben, der die Natur des Elementaren bewahrt (Nous ist in der Dianoia präsent und diese wiederum in der Seele). Das entspricht der Lehre von *Philebos*, dem zufolge das vierte Genos (die Ursache) die Vernunft in allen ihren Erscheinungen einschließt: den demiurgischen Nous, die Vernunft der Weltseele sowie die menschliche Vernunft (*Phil.* 29a–30c).[38]

Kronos’ Vater ist Uranos, „wie erzählt wird“ (ὡς λόγος, 396b). Die Erwähnung des Logos deutet darauf hin, dass auch „Uranos“ kein Name im üblichen Sinne ist;[39] und tatsächlich stellt er eher eine *Erklärung* dar, und zwar eine komplizierte, obwohl, wie gesagt, ernst gemeinte: Der Name οὐρανία bezeichne die „Hinaufsicht zur Höhe“ (ἡ ἐς τὸ ἄνω ὄψις), die sieht, was oben ist (ὁρῶσα τὰ ἄνω), von woher (ὅθεν) – wie die Himmelskundigen sagen – der reine Nous komme (τὸν καθαρὸν νοῦν παραγίγνεσθαι, 396c2). Deswegen stehe auch dem Uranos der „Name“ zu.

Der reine Nous ist also einerseits die Ursache (δι’ ὅν) des Alls, anderseits hat er selbst jedoch ein „Woher“ (ὅθεν), das auf der theologischen Ebene dem Vater Uranos entspricht. Und während sich im Fall zweier niedrigeren Gottheiten die Richtigkeit ihrer Namen und die Vater-Sohn-Erbschaft synonym-genetischen ergibt, kann im Fall des Uranos von keiner Synonymie mehr die Rede sein, insofern sein „Name“ bloß aus einer Reihe von Hinweisen besteht, laut denen die niedrigeren von ihm abhängen: die Beziehung zu ihnen besteht also nur noch genetisch.

Dadurch wird auch der Punkt genau greifbar, an dem die platonische Kosmologie, die nichts Höheres als die reine Vernunft kennt, ins Metaphysische übergeht. Diejenigen Interpreten, die die Passage ausschließlich kosmologisch lesen, verstehen sie als eine Behauptung, die Reinheit der (menschlichen) Vernunft entstamme der Astronomie, in dem Sinne, wie die astronomische Disziplin eine Voraussetzung für die Philosophie ist (*Resp.* VII 527d–528a;

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38 Diese Synonymie hängt auch hier eng mit der genetischen Terminologie zusammen (vgl. *Phil.* 25d3).

39 Dies stellt vielmehr das Adjektiv οὐρανία dar, siehe 396b8–c1.

Tim. 47b–c, 90c–d).[40] Diese Interpretation ist jedoch schwer zu akzeptieren, insofern sie gerade auf der höchsten Stufe der Wirklichkeit einen Regress voraussetzt: von der Ebene des reinen Nous – des Urhebers der Welt wird dazu zurückgekehrt, was in Wirklichkeit ein Teil dieser Welt ist. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass die Passage einer metaphysischen Deutung bedarf.

Uranos stellt zudem keineswegs die letzte Stufe dar. Sokrates weist auf die Existenz noch höherer (ἀνωτέρω) Vorfahren in der hesiodischen Genealogie hin.[41] Wenn er behauptet, er erinnere sich nicht mehr an diese letzte Stufe, klingt es nahezu lächerlich. Dass die höchste Stufe der hesiodischen Genealogie überhaupt Chaos und Gaia darstellen, dürfte jemandem wie Sokrates bestens vertraut gewesen sein. Formal gesehen kann der Grund für Sokrates' Aussparung der höchsten Stufe darin liegen, dass hier die Ordnung der bisherigen Genealogie verletzt wird: Auf der höchsten Stufe begegnen wir *zwei* Elementen, von denen nur das weibliche, nämlich Gaia, für die Zeus-Kronos-Uranos-Genealogie produktiv ist. Ihre Erwähnung wäre also eine komische, aristophanische Pointe, wonach auf der höchsten Ebene der Wirklichkeit die Travestie der Geschlechter eintritt.

Abgesehen von der Komik, repräsentiert das Paar Chaos und Gaia in Hesiods *Theogonie* eine für das griechische theologische Denken typische Gestalt: Die Götter sowie die kosmischen Kräfte sind vom Anfang an in zwei polarisierte Sphären gespalten, die entweder von Chaos oder von Gaia beherrscht werden, d. h. von einem Prinzip der Unbegrenztheit einerseits und einem peratischen Prinzip andererseits (*Theog.* 116 ff.).[42]

Falls wir uns jetzt auf das Peratische konzentrieren und Gaia auf die höchste Stufe der *Kratylos*-Genealogie setzen, fällt uns ein interessanter intertextueller Zusammenhang ins Auge, nämlich der mit der Güterhierarchie vom Ende des Platonischen *Philebos* (66a–c); die erste Stufe dieser Güterhierarchie bilden das Maß (μέτρον), das Angemessene (μέτριον) und Zeitige (καίρον), die zweite Stufe das Gleichmäßige (σύμμετρον), Schöne (καλόν), Vollendete (τέλεον) und Hinlängliche (ἱκανόν), die dritte Stufe die Vernunft (νοῦς) und Einsicht (φρόνησις) und die vierte Stufe die Vermögen der Seele (auf der letzten, fünften Stufe befindet sich Lust, ἡδονή).[43]

40 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 91; Ademollo, *Commentary*, 192.
41 Die Genealogie ist somit viergliederig: ψυχή – διανοία/νοῦς – ὅθεν/ἄνω – ἀνωτέρω.
42 Paula Philippson, *Untersuchungen über den griechischen Mythos* (Zürich: Rhein Verlag, 1944), 51–68.
43 Es sei auch in Erinnerung gebracht, dass gerade nach dem *Philebos* das Sein ein Ergebnis der Genese ist (25b–26d). Siehe oben, Anm. 7.

Das Maß, μέτρον entspricht sachlich der „Genauigkeit an sich“ (αὐτὸ τἀκριβές) im *Politikos* (284d2);[44] in der *Politeia* wird es mit der Idee des Guten gleichgesetzt.[45] Wenn wir es wagen, dazu noch die indirekte Platon-Tradition in Betracht zu ziehen, der zufolge auf dieser höchsten Ebene nicht nur ein ἀνυπόθετον (*Resp.* VI 511b3–c2) steht, sondern ein Paar von entgegengesetzten Prinzipien, deren Zusammenwirken oder Mischung für die γένεσις der niedrigeren Stufen verantwortlich ist,[46] wird das Bild der Theologie des *Kratylos* komplett – einschließlich der Dualität der Gottheiten auf der höchsten Stufe sowie der inneren Spaltung von Zeus als einer Zusammensetzung von Dualität ins Eine, die das ganze lebende All ausdrückt (s. den Anhang).

5 Der Dialektiker

Sokrates’ Tätigkeit im Dialog entspricht der Rolle eines Dialektikers, dem die Aufsicht über die Arbeit des Onomatourgos zukommt und der das Ergebnis, d. h. die Richtigkeit der gegeben Namen, beurteilt (390c–d).[47] Von hier aus ist auch Sokrates’ Vergesslichkeit bezüglich der höchsten Stufe der göttlichen Genealogie gut nachvollziehbar. Von anderswo wissen wir, dass der Dialektiker die Diskussion abbrechen muss, sobald er an die Grenze der höchsten Lehrinhalte stößt, um diese nicht unangemessen oder vorzeitig mitzuteilen.[48] Die typische Figur des Loslassens des Philosophen[49] hat in unserem Dialog eine komisch-erotische Gestalt. Sokrates kommentiert seine Fähigkeit, die

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44 Es ist dabei gewichtig, dass τὸ μέτριον im *Politikos* auf einer metaphysisch niedrigeren Stufe als αὐτὸ τἀκριβές steht, insofern es selber „entsteht“ (vgl. *Polit.* 284c1).

45 *Resp.* VI 504b8–c4.

46 Aristoteles, *Met.* XIV 2, 1089a2–6; Alexander von Aphrosidias, *In Arist. Met.* 56, 13–35 Hayduck; vgl. Platon, *Phil.* 26d7–9.

47 Sokrates ist derjenige, der das gegebene Material (die aus verschiedenen Buchstaben und Syllaben zusammengesetzten Onomata) von verschiedenen – sowohl bekannten (Homer, Hesiod) als auch anonymen, griechischen sowie barbarischen – Onomatourgoi übernimmt, beurteilt und eventuell auch modifiziert. Er ist der Stifter der Einheit, die in seinen Händen aus der ursprünglichen Pluralität entsteht.

48 Platon, *Phdr.* 275e f.; *Leg.* XII 968e4–5; Thomas Alexander Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie* (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985).

49 Vgl. ebd., 271–326. Das typische Zögern des Philosophen, die tiefgründigsten Lehrinhalte zu verraten, ist in unserem Dialog auch – und außerordentlich bildhaft – auf die Figur von Kratylos projiziert. Hermogenes zufolge möchte Kratylos ihm nicht mitteilen, was er mit seiner naturalistischen Sprachtheorie genau meint (383b–384a). Bemerkenswert ist Sokrates’ Reaktion auf diese Klage: Er scheint weit davon entfernt zu sein, Kratylos irgendwie zum Sprechen überreden zu wollen; stattdessen konzediert er – mit vollem Respekt zum Schweigen seines späteren Gesprächspartners –, die schönen Dinge seien

Etymologien der Götternamen weiter zu verfolgen, mit Worten, die sexuelle Ausdauer evozieren (396c7–d1).

Hermogenes ignoriert aber – wohl absichtlich – diesen Witz und interpretiert Sokrates' Aussage unerotisch, wobei er sich auf deren späteren Teil („die Weisheit ist mir von oben zugefallen") konzentriert, den er mit dem göttlichen Enthusiasmos, und so mit der ἄνω- und ὅθεν-Thematik der vorherigen Passage assoziiert (vgl. *Ion* 535c).[50] Es scheint, dass Hermogenes sich nicht mit dem Verlassen der erreichten philosophischen Ebene abfinden möchte.

Sokrates ist dadurch gezwungen, noch tiefer ins Obszöne ab zu sinken, wenn er die Enthusiasmos-Hypothese mit dem Hinweis ablehnt, er habe die ganze Nacht mit Euthyphron verbracht,[51] der ihm „nicht nur die Ohren mit der übermenschlichen Weisheit (τῆς δαιμονίας σοφίας, 396d7–8) angefüllt hat".[52]

Der restliche Teil der Auslegung der Götternamen und eigentlich auch der ganze restliche etymologische Teil sind gerade durch diesen Austausch und von Sokrates' Unwilligkeit betroffen, den Dialog im ernsten Ton fortzusetzen.

In der Literatur wurde öfters darauf hingewiesen, dass sich hinter den folgenden Etymologien die Vorstellung der Wirklichkeit als eines ständigen Flusses verbirgt, die in einer Spannung zur Stabilität der Ideenwelt steht.[53] Dies ist natürlich richtig. Unrichtig wäre dagegen, darin eine ambivalente Wirkung zweier Auffassungen – der heraklitischen einerseits, der eleatischen andererseits – zu sehen, etwa in dem Sinne, wie Aristoteles die intellektuelle

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schwierig, wobei er die hier diskutierte Theorie der Namen als „kein kleines Lehrstück" bezeichnet (οὐ σμικρὸν μάθημα, 384b2).

50 Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 58.

51 Zum Gestalt Euthyphrons, s. weiter: 399a, 399e f., 407d7, 409d1, vgl. 428c7.

52 Dieselbe erotische Anspielung auf die unter den verliebten Männern fließenden „Weisheit" finden wir an der berühmten Stelle des platonischen *Symposion* (175d–e).

53 Den Hintergrund des Bildes der ständigen Bewegung bildet ebenfalls die erotische Metaphorik des Fließens. Der von jeglicher Zeugungsausrichtung und nur auf die willkürliche homoerotische Lust gerichtete erotische Fluss stellt ein Element des Chaos dar, wie es in den Etymologien sogar der allerwichtigsten Göttlichkeiten gezeigt wird (Apollon, Kronos). Die erotischen Anspielungen werden jedoch nie pauschal gemacht, ihre Wirkung wird immer von der jeweiligen Auffassung bestimmt: So ist Hades, der Auffassung Sokrates' selbst zufolge zwar ein starker Erotiker, aber im strikt *platonischen* Sinne der unkörperlichen Erotik (403e–404b); dagegen wird Apollon im Licht der *pythagoreischen* Auffassung als ein ausgesprochener Lüstling vorgestellt (405a–406a); die *heraklitische* Lehre ist dann dafür verantwortlich, dass Kronos, gänzlich abweichend von der ursprünglichen metaphysischen Auslegung (s. Sokrates' Kommentar auf 401e f.), als ein „Geysir" aufgefasst wird (402b). Das kontrastiert wiederum mit der Auffassung Orfeus', der Okeanos für den Urheber der Trauungen hält (ebd.).

Entwicklung von Platon auslegt.[54] Jene Fluss-Stabilität-Ambivalenz ist kein Merkmal der inneren Spannung in Sokrates' Seele. Der Gesprächsführer hat die Ambivalenz stets unter Kontrolle, weil ihm das Zusammenwirken zweier Gegensätze im Sinne von *Philebos* oder der indirekten Überlieferung bekannt ist; er selber kann somit zum Urheber der Ordnung im Unbemessenen werden und die Vielheit zur Einheit zurückführen.[55] Das Element, dem diese ordnende und einheitsstiftende Funktion auf allen Ebenen zukommt,[56] ist der reine Nous.

Die traditionelle Gegenüberstellung von Menschen und Götter, die schon bei der Homer-Exegese gescheitert ist, wird hier in Frage gestellt, wenn die Möglichkeit zugestanden wird, einige Menschen könnten ausdrücklich im selben Maße wie die Dämonen vernünftig sein (398a7). In einem späteren Passus, wo Sokrates wieder einmal seine Kenntnis ausspart, wenn er die Forderung des Hermogenes ablehnt, über die anderen Götter genauso wie früher über Zeus vorzutragen (400d), behauptet er, wir wüssten nichts von den Göttern; unmittelbar darauf aber leugnet er selber diese These, indem er apodiktisch behauptet, die Götter verwendeten die richtigen Namen.[57] Es ist offensichtlich, dass er seinen Skeptizismus nur vortäuscht. Sokrates hat an der Kenntnis der Götter teil.[58]

54 Vgl. Aristoteles, *Met.* I 6, 987a29–b1.

55 So setzt die etymologische Erwägung des Sokrates über die Götter bei der Vorstellung der immer sich bewegenden kosmischen Gottheiten (397b–c) an und schließt mit der Lehre von den Jahreszeiten (410c–e), die gerade eine solche Begrenzung der ständigen Götterbewegung darstellen.

56 Vgl. die analoge Schilderung der höheren Wesenheiten (Dämonen, Heroen und Menschen) mit den noetischen Gottheiten Zeus-Kronos-Uranos in unserem Dialog.

57 δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι ἐκεῖνοί γε τἀληθῆ καλοῦσι. 400d9.

58 Die Arbeit an diesem Beitrag wurde aus Mitteln der Tschechischen Agentur für Wissenschaftsförderung (Forschungsprojekt Nr. 17-20152S) gefördert.

TABELLE 6.1 Anhang: Metaphysische Abstufung der Namen und Wesenheiten

ONOMA	OUSIA	*PHILEBOS*	ANDERE DIALOGE	INDIREKTE TRADITION
[Gaia (–Chaos)]	ἀνωτέρω (höher)	μέτρον, μέτριον, καιρόν (das Maß, das Angemessene, das Zeitige)	αὐτὸ τἀκριβές, ἀνυπόθετον, ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ (Genauigkeit an sich, das Unhypothetische, Idee des Guten)	[ἕν (– ἀόριστος δυάς)] (das Eine – die unbestimmte Zweiheit)
Uranos	ὅθεν ὁ νοῦς/ἄνω (woher die Vernunft [kommt]/oben)	σύμμετρον, καλόν, τέλεον, ἱκανόν (das Gleichmäßige, das Schöne, das Vollendete, das Hinlängliche)		
Kronos	διάνοια/νοῦς (Verstand/ Vernunft)	νοῦς, φρόνησις (Vernunft, Einsicht)		
Zeus	ψυχή (Seele)	ψυχή (Seele)		
Orestes, Atreus, Pelops, Tantalos	ὀρεινόν, ἀτηρός, πέλας, ταλαντεία (gebirgig, unsittlich, nahe, das Schweben)	ἡδονή (Lust)		

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CHAPTER 7

Commerce, Theft and Deception

The Etymology of Hermes in Plato's Cratylus

Olof Pettersson

Abstract

In the light of Socrates' largely neglected etymological account of the name Hermes, this article reexamines the dialogue's perplexing conclusion that reality should not be sought through names, but through itself. By a close scrutiny of three claims made in this etymology – that language is commercial, thievish and deceptive – it argues that Socrates' discussion about the relation between names and reality cannot only be meaningfully understood in terms of his characterization of language as deceptive and therefore tragic, but that this point is also confirmed by the dialogue's larger comedic structure and by Cratylus' framing joke about Hermogenes' name. As a consequence, the article also suggests that a closer examination of the etymology of Hermes can both help to assess a certain unwarranted optimism common in contemporary scholarship and the claim that the dialogue's overarching purpose, rather than being an explanation of how human language grants access to the truth about the existing things, is a critical examination of such a project and of its hubristic assumptions.

Keywords

Cratylus – Plato – etymology – language – Hermes – tragedy – comedy – names

1 Introduction[1]

Although Socrates' etymology of the name Hermes (407e5–408b3) is largely

1 This text has many debts. It has been greatly improved by the detailed comments of Vladimír Mikeš. Initially, its cause was importantly encouraged by Filip Karfík, who also invited me to the *XI Symposium Platonicum Pragense,* in 2017, where I received invaluable critique from the learned audience. Alesia Preite and the other participants of the *Language and Reality*

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neglected in the research literature,[2] it is important for at least three reasons. First, it can help elucidate the dialogue's main subject matter and Socrates' concluding claim that an investigation into names cannot be used to understand reality. Second, it is important for understanding the dialogue's comedic framework by connecting Cratylus' joke about Hermogenes' name with Socrates' discussion of name-use and name-making.[3] Third, the etymology can also help to assess a certain unwarranted optimism common in contemporary scholarship. Regardless of whether Socrates' etymological enterprise is taken to be serious or parodic, it is often assumed that the dialogue's overarching purpose is to explain how human language grants access to the truth about existing things.[4] Yet, insofar as there are reasons to doubt this purpose, the

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workshop in Groningen in January 2018, helped me develop my argument, as did to the members of the Plato reading group at the University of Bergen and the assiduous participants of the History of Philosophy seminar, chaired by Pauliina Remes, at Uppsala University. All of its flaws are, of course, still my own.

2 One important exception is Sean D. Kirkland, "Logos as the Message from the Gods: On the Etymology of Hermes in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch Fur Antike Und Mittelalter* 12, 1 (2007): 1–14. See also Shane Montgomery Ewegen, *Plato's* Cratylus*: The Comedy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 38; John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 250–254; Michael Riley, *Plato's* Cratylus*: Argument, Form, and Structure* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 78–79. However, Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), offers no discussion of this passage, despite his comprehensive ambitions, neither does Franco Trivigno, "Etymology and the Power of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 32, 1, (2012). But see David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 95–96.

3 Discussions about Hermes and the joke about Hermogenes' name are brought to the surface at least three times in the dialogue, first, at 383b–384c, where it is used to introduce the problem of natural naming, then, at 407d–408b, where the joke is explained and the name Hermes gets its etymology, and, then, finally, at 429b–e, where the dialogue is brought to a close by introducing the final matter of discussion. Barney, *Names and Nature*, 160 wants to add 440e to the list. There Socrates claims that Hermogenes shall *conduct* Cratylus. The verb used is πορεύειν, a word often used to describe Hermes and his role as a divine escort and guide.

4 Scholars that take the etymologies to be seriously meant philosophical accounts, include John N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973); David Sedley, "The Etymologies in Plato's Cratylus," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 118 (1998), 140–154; Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus; Sedley, "Plato on Language," in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. H. Benson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007); George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates*, vol. 2, (London: J. Murray, 1867). Scholars that take them to be comic, playful or parodic, include Sallis, *Being and Logos*; Roger Brock, "Plato and Comedy," in *Owls to Athens: Essays on Classical Subjects Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover*, ed. E. M. Craik (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 39–49; James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); Francisco J. Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press,

debate is confused. As I hope to show, we have cause to entertain the idea that Plato's purpose in the *Cratylus* cannot be understood as an attempt to establish how language is the key to reality and that the etymology of Hermes can help to ascertain this point.

I begin with a brief analysis of Socrates' concluding remarks about the relation of names and reality. I then examine this conclusion in the light of Socrates' etymology of the name Hermes and put it in context. I analyze three of the etymology's central suggestions: that language is commercial, thievish and deceptive. I examine how these suggestions are vindicated and conclude by asking how they concur with the general purpose of the dialogue.

2 Names and Reality

At the end of the *Cratylus*, Plato makes Socrates claim that it is a mistake to think that names contain infallible information about reality (439b4–8). Socrates argues that the names do not have divine origin (438c5–6; see also 436b9–11) and that the very subject matter may have distorted their inquiry.[5] "He who in his inquiry after things (τὰ πράγματα) follows names (ἀκολουθοῖ τοῖς ὀνόμασι)", Socrates explains, "and examines the meaning of each one runs no small risk of being deceived (ἐξαπατηθῆναι)" (436a9–b2).[6] Although Socrates eventually goes on to suggest that the matter may be too great a question for them to determine, he nevertheless insists that it is "worthwhile to have reached even this conclusion, that they [sc. τὰ ὄντα] are to be learned and sought for, not from names but rather through themselves than through names" (439b4–8). If we are to learn or discover (μανθάνειν ἢ εὑρίσκειν, 439b4) anything about reality, Socrates concludes, we should go directly to the source, and stop investigating how we talk. In light of the preceding discussion, and its

1998); Andrea Nightingale, "Subtext and Subterfuge in Plato's *Cratylus*," in *Plato as Author: The Rhetoric of Philosophy*, ed. A. N. Michelini (Leiden: Brill, 2003). On the other hand, Trivigno ("Etymology and the Power"), Ewegen (*Plato's* Cratylus) and Barney (*Names and Nature*) move beyond this dichotomy and suggest that the serious purpose of the etymologies must be seen in the light of their parodic intention. See also Rachel Barney, "Socrates Agonistes: The Case of the *Cratylus* Etymologies," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1998).

5 For a more extensive account, see Olof Pettersson, "The Legacy of Hermes: Deception and Dialectic in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Journal for Ancient Philosophy* 10, 1 (2016).

6 The text I have used is Burnet's *Platonis Opera* from 1900 (rep. 1967) published in Oxford by Clarendon. All translations are based on C. D. C. Reeve's version in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper & D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

long and elaborate investigation into the etymological origins of names, this is an odd conclusion. Why does Plato make Socrates express these doubts about the reliability of the preceding examination? And how far is Plato willing to go in disqualifying the examination of language as key to reality?

3 Socrates' Etymology of Hermes

Socrates' etymology of the name Hermes offers an important clue. The analysis of the etymological origins of names is not to be trusted because human language is deceptive. This deceptive feature is part of a more general characterization of language, and is, as we shall see, indispensable to assess what is at stake. It foreshadows the pessimistic character of the dialogue's concluding argument and it anchors Socrates' final claims about names and reality, with subtle allusions, in earlier parts of the dialogue.

The etymology is introduced as a part of Socrates' general analysis of the names of the gods. After a number of attempts to etymologize their names, Socrates explains that he does not want to pursue the matter. He is afraid, he says, to talk about the gods in this way. However, Hermogenes is not satisfied with this and insists that Socrates should analyze at least one more divine name. He reminds Socrates of Cratylus' initial joke on his behalf and of how the whole discussion started. Hermogenes really wants Socrates to talk about the god related to his own name. Finally, Socrates also agrees to risk one more and puts it like this:

> Well then, 'Hermes' (ὁ Ἑρμῆς) seems to have something to do with language (ἔοικε περὶ λόγον τι εἶναι). And to be an interpreter (τὸ ἑρμηνέα εἶναι), a messenger (τὸ ἄγγελον), to be thievish (καὶ τὸ κλοπικόν), deceptive in speech (καὶ τὸ ἀπατηλὸν ἐν λόγοις), and to be commercial (καὶ τὸ ἀγοραστικόν) – all this activity involves the power of language (περὶ λόγου δύναμίν ἐστιν). Now, as we mentioned before, to talk (εἴρειν) means to use language (λόγου χρεία ἐστί); and the other part of the name says – as Homer often does – contrived (ἐμήσατο), which means to devise (μηχανᾶσθαι). And it was out of these two words that the lawgiver established the name of the god who devised speech and language, since to talk (εἴρειν) means the same as to speak (λέγειν). It's just as if he told us: "Humans, it would be right for you to call the god who has contrived speech (τὸ εἴρειν ἐμήσατο) Eiremes (εἰρέμης)." But we, beautifying the name, as we suppose, call him Hermes. (407e5–408b3)

The etymology goes back to 398d6–8 and to Socrates' analysis of the name hero (ἥρως).[7] There we learned that εἴρειν (to talk) means the same as λέγειν (to speak) and that this, as our present passage also makes plain, involves the use of language (λόγος). By combining εἴρειν with ἐμήσατο, the aorist of μήδομαι (meaning : plan and do cunningly), which, according to Socrates, means to contrive or to devise (μηχανᾶσθαι), we get εἰρέμης.[8] This word has however been modified, we learn, and transformed into Ἑρμῆς.[9]

In order to prepare for these derivations, Socrates begins by articulating a set of general observations. Apart from the less controversial point that language has something to do with interpretation and messaging, he also identifies three more puzzling characteristics.[10] Language is associated with being commercial (ἀγοραστικόν), with being thievish (κλοπικόν) and this, apparently, involves deception in speech (ἀπατηλὸν ἐν λόγοις). Although the connection between language and these characteristics may seem to be somewhat loose, there are no reasons to mistrust Socrates. Hermes is said to be the father of speech and talk. When we speak and talk we use language and language has thus inherited some of Hermes' main characteristics. The question is not *if* Socrates draws on the character of Hermes to describe language, but why. Let us take a closer look.

4 The Commerce of Language

Socrates' suggestion that language has to do with commerce goes back to 384b6–384a7 and to the dialogue's beginning. Here Hermogenes asks Socrates to explain why Cratylus claims that his name is wrong and why this is funny. Since Cratylus is not himself willing to clarify, Socrates steps in.[11] Cratylus,

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7 Here, strangely enough, the wisdom of the rhetoricians is equated with the wisdom of the dialecticians: Socrates suggests that the word ἥρως means that the heroes "were wise and clever orators and dialecticians (σοφοὶ ἦσαν καὶ ῥήτορες καὶ δεινοὶ καὶ διαλεκτικοί) […] for εἴρειν is the same as λέγειν" (398d6–8).

8 At 415a4–9 μηχανή gets its own explanatory etymology, an etymology that Socrates calls the head (κορυφή) of them all! It means "ἄνειν ἐπὶ πολύ (much accomplishment); for μῆκος (length) has about the same meaning as τὸ πολύ (much), and the name μηχανή is composed of these two, μῆκος and ἄνειν".

9 For a slightly different account, see Ewegen, *Plato's* Cratylus, 45–49.

10 For discussion about these less controversial points, see Kirkland, "Logos as the Message," 9–10; Barney, *Names and Nature*, 78–79; Ewegen, *Plato's* Cratylus, 40–49.

11 In line with his general evasiveness, evidenced by his unwillingness to say more than three words in the first 65 pages of the 86 page dialogue (see 383a3), Cratylus refuses to say what he means. Nightingale observes: "Note that Cratylus never offers his own

Socrates explains, is trying to have some fun on Hermogenes' account, because "you, in wanting to make money and riches (χρημάτων ἐφιέμενον κτήσεως), fail every time" (384c5–6). Socrates does not say much more about this until he comes to the etymology of Hermes. Here, however, the point is made clear. Hermogenes' name is wrong, because Hermo*genes* – that is, the son or offspring of Hermes – has not inherited his ancestor's sense of business. For Hermogenes' name to be correct, he would have needed to show some commercial (ἀγοραστικόν) orientation.[12] But in contrast to his rich brother Callias, Hermogenes is not even in control of his own inheritance (391c2).

Although this joke undeniably trades on Hermogenes' lack of money, it also makes another, more subtle, point. Hermogenes' name may not contain sufficient descriptive information to pick him out, yet both Socrates and Cratylus know who they are talking about.[13] The use of the name works in its given context, even if it does not correspond to what its etymological analysis reveals. As this goes to show, the passage does not only suggest that Cratylus assumes that names are self-enclosed and use-independent entities, it also offers us reasons to think that Socrates is problematizing this position and that his ensuing argument relates to this point.

That Socrates talks about a use-independent understanding of language and naming in commercial terms should not be overly surprising. Just as in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates warns the young Hippocrates against involving himself with sophists and their commercial treatment of doctrine (313c), the *Cratylus* concerns the well-established sophistical practice of etymological analysis.[14] In the *Cratylus,* the analogy may be more covert than in the *Protagoras*, but the basic idea is nevertheless the same. Just as we treat merchandise, Cratylus treats names. Just as the sophists reportedly consider doctrines as possible to sell and buy in the *Protagoras*, Cratylus is here taken to

account of the 'natural correctness of names' […] It is Hermogenes who states Cratylus' basic position." ("Subtext and Subterfuge," 226). At 429b12–c5, Socrates returns to the peculiarities of Hermogenes' name, and again asks Cratylus what he means when he says that Hermogenes does not have the correct name. At this point, Cratylus is more willing to speak than before. As we shall see, this is an important dramatic change that pertains to the thievish (κλοπικόν) nature of language.

12 Reeve translates ἀγοραστικόν, in context, as *wheeler-dealer*. Others have it differently. Sallis (*Being and Logos*, 250) has *bargainer*. I suppose *monger, entrepreneur, trader* or *peddler* would also work. As pointed out by Ewegen (*Plato's* Cratylus, 14), Hermes is the god of the *agora*, a word that of course resounds in ἀγοραστικόν. Barney (*Names and Nature*, 78) has the more literally accurate adjective *commercial.*

13 See 434c–435d and the discussion of σκληρότης (hardness).

14 So, e.g., Ademollo, *Commentary*, 428.

treat the names as entities that can be transferred from one person to another without the names being affected by the transaction, in the sense that he thinks that the names are dependent on neither the person who is to use them nor the context in which they are to be used.[15] That Socrates has some reasons to show why and how such a commercial treatment of names and language is as common as it is problematic is also clear from his own take on the matter a few pages before the etymology of Hermes is introduced.

5 The Function of Names

The argument to this end culminates at around 390c3 where Socrates suggests that the natural correctness of the names should be judged in terms of use, but that this is rarely the case. Socrates' argument begins as a refutation of the conventionalist position ascribed to Hermogenes.[16] Based on the assumption that *as things seem to each, so they also are*, Hermogenes' Protagorean view contends that the correctness of a name is whatever each individual person says it is (384d2–3).[17]

In order to refute this view, Socrates starts in the familiar way. He asks if there are good and bad people. Hermogenes answers that there certainly are and Socrates goes on to inquire if "the very good [are] very wise and the very bad very foolish" (386b10–12). Again Hermogenes says yes. This, Socrates concludes, is enough. Insofar as it is unlikely that all men share the same beliefs, one cannot at the same time think that things are as they seem to each and that some have it wrong (386d2–6). Instead, Socrates suggests, Hermogenes' consent has other implications. If one is to maintain that there are both wise

15 Isocrates may be thought to suggest something similar. See Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34; Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 227.

16 Rachel Barney correctly argues that Hermogenes' actual position is much more reasonable and commonsensical than the position Socrates actually comes to refute. "Plato on Conventionalism," *Phronesis* 42, 1 (1997). See also Imogen Smith, "Taking the Tool Analogy Seriously: Forms and Naming in the *Cratylus*," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 60 (2014).

17 I have borrowed the characterization of the Protagorean position, in italics, from M. M. Mackenzie, "Putting the Cratylus in its Place," *The Classical Quarterly* 36, 1 (1986), 129. My argument, just as McKenzie's, requires that 385b-c is in the right place in the text. This has been disputed by Malcolm Schofield, "A Displacement in the Text of the *Cratylus*," *The Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972): 246–253. On Hermogenes' Protagorean point of view, see Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 196.

and ignorant people, one must also accept that "things (τὰ πράγματα) have some stable being (οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιόν)" (386e1–2). The beings of things do not depend on us, Socrates suggests, "nor [are they] caused by us" (386e2). Hermogenes agrees also to this and Socrates goes on to apply this principle to three cases: action, speaking and, most importantly, naming. As with things, Socrates argues, each action has its own stable being. Since speech is a part of action, and naming is a part of speech, the principle also applies to naming. The act of naming or name-use – not to be confused with name-making – is not to each what they find fit. Instead, it has its own distinct nature. With this established, Socrates goes on to claim that it is thus reasonable that we "name things in a natural way for them to be named and with what is natural for naming them" (387d4–5). Hermogenes agrees and Socrates goes on to investigate to what this natural use of the names amounts.

Socrates argues by analogy. Just as in cutting and burning, he suggests, naming is performed with a tool (ὄργανον, 388a8) – just as one needs a knife to cut, one needs a name to name. In order specify what this entails, Socrates begins by focusing on the tool and asks what it is that the name is supposed to do (ποιεῖν, 388b8). Just as a shuttle is a tool for weaving, he continues, so a name is a tool for teaching (ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστιν ὄργανον).[18] As a tool to analyze the things that are (διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας), the teachers use names in accordance with the nature of their practice (388b13-c1).[19] Even if the notion of teaching, here at stake, is controversial, two things are nevertheless clear. A name has a practical function and its natural correctness is to be judged by its ability to perform this function.

Socrates' ensuing argument confirms these points. In order to establish a distinction between the name-users and the name-makers, Socrates introduces the term lawgiver (νομοθέτης, 389a2). Is it not the law, Socrates asks, that gives us the names?[20] Confirmed by Hermogenes' conventionalist consent, Socrates goes on to ask how the specific action of the lawgivers is supposed to be performed. Again, Socrates answers by analogy. Just as the carpenters make

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18 Ademollo, *Commentary*, 129, has *pin-beater* instead of *shuttle* for κερκίς.

19 Here, I take τῆς οὐσίας to parallel τὰ πράγματα, used a few lines above (386e1). Both are said to be stable, but neither of them is used in any stronger technical sense. Presumably, Socrates is not talking about the Forms. As the examples of cutting, burning and weaving make clear, the stability at stake is not exclusive to superhuman reality. For the view that Socrates has a different priority and that he wants to say that the real function of the names is to describe ultimate reality and that teaching is subordinate to this function, see Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 208. See also Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 61–66; Trivigno, "Etymology and the Power," 70.

20 Supposedly, this is a pun: ὁ νομοθέτης is very much like ὄνομ[α]-οθέτης.

the shuttles to be used in weaving, so the lawmakers make the names to be used in naming. Just as in the case of the shuttles, the names must be made in accordance with the practical *function* that they are supposed to have in each specific context.

> [I]t seems that there is a form (εἶδος) of shuttle that is naturally suited to each type of weaving. And the same holds of tools in general. (389d1–2)

Depending on the tool's function, it has a specific shape or form. In naming, or name-use, this form corresponds to the individual name's specific function; and it is in terms of this function-form that the name-makers' ability is to be judged.

> On this basis, then, you will judge the lawgiver [or name-maker], whether he be here or in foreign land, so long as he gives each thing the proper form of the name (τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος εἶδος), in whatsoever letters. (390a4–6)

These passages have led some scholars to introduce the concept of a name-Form.[21] In order to encompass the claim that a naturally correct name is sound-independent ("here or in foreign land"), but still established in accordance with a form, it has been considered necessary to introduce a mediating notion that could explain how the names identify the real things without being the things they are names of.[22]

21 Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus*,* 82.

22 Sedley argues that the name-makers use these so-called name-Forms when they make the names and that these name-Forms do not only have the same origin as the other Forms (see 439b10–d1 and onwards), but that they are also somehow metaphysically bound to the things they name. Sedley further analyses the name-Forms in a generic and a specific category. While the generic name-Form is the very Form-Form of the name, the specific name-Form is, "say, the Form of the name of dog". The function of this specific name-Form "is giving instruction by vocally separating what a dog is". Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 82. And this is necessary, he argues, because if one would try to embody the Form-Form of a dog directly, one would not end up with a name, but with a dog. On this view, a name is thus not an embodied thing, but the embodiment of a (specific) name-Form. This embodiment can be more or less comprehensive, but in order to be correct it must always, at a minimum, express some aspect of the name-Form, and thus indirectly of the reality which this name-Form is a name of. In this way he also argues that the same name-Form can be expressed by different sounds and, in effect, in different languages: "Just as the precise wood or metal used by an ordinary manufacturer may vary without determent to his product, so the sound system in which the name-maker creates names will vary according to his nationality". Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 66.

Judging by how Socrates talks about shapes or forms in this context, it is however not necessary to make this interpretative move.[23] As we shall see, there is another explanation, that does not need to introduce a concept foreign to the text (i.e. the name-Form), but that still can explain Socrates' talk about shapes or forms.

Socrates' discussion of how the name-makers' work is to be judged and superintended is decisive. Even if Socrates does say that the art of name-making aims at making names that pick out the things they name ("so long as he gives each thing the proper form of the name"), their natural correctness is not established on the basis of the name-maker's competence alone. The correctness of names is instead to be judged in practice and by their ability to perform their function. Socrates argues by analogy:

> Now, who is likely to know whether the proper form (τὸ προσῆκον εἶδος) of shuttle is embodied in any piece of wood? The carpenter who made it (ὁ ποιήσας, ὁ τέκτων) or the weaver who is to use it (ὁ χρησόμενος ὁ ὑφάντης)? (390b1–3)

Hermogenes answers that it is "the one who is to use it" and Socrates agrees. In order to make the names in accordance with the forms, then, the name-makers need to adapt their creations to the user (ὁ χρησόμενος, 390b2–3). This means that the name-users judge the creations of the name-makers independently. If the name-user, in analogy with the weaver, considers a name to have the wrong shape or form, it cannot perform its function and is not correct (see 390c1–3). Accordingly, the creations of the name-makers are to correspond to the proper form (τὸ προσῆκον εἶδος) of the name, not by independent correspondence to something external to the name-users' needs, but by catering to these needs.

To get this point straight, it is important to keep one thing in mind. Name-making is described as a fallible endeavor. Even if Socrates' soon will come to suggest that there is a realm of divine names (391d8), the names Socrates is talking about here are made for human use. This is presumably also why Socrates insists that the name-makers are supervised by the name-users. Even if each name ideally is informed by the function-form it is supposes to perform, it cannot be taken for granted that a given name has been suitably formed so

23 With some reservations, others have endorsed a similar view, suggesting that even if it is not the sounds that carry the load, Socrates does think that the names are naturally correct insofar as they have a stable connection with the Forms they refer to. See, e.g. Trivigno, "Etymology and the Power," 43–44.

that it performs its function effectively. Instead, names must be evaluated in practice by someone with the proper skill.

As we have seen, this means that the natural correctness of names is to be judged in terms of how well they function, which is measured by how closely they correspond to the needs of the users. This does not mean that the users make the names, of course. This is still up to the name-makers. But it does mean that the name-makers cannot start making names alone. When Socrates talks about form (εἶδος) to explain the correctness of the names (389d1), or when he explains what "the proper form (τὸ προσῆκον εἶδος)" of a names is (390b1–2), it thus seems unlikely that he is talking about how the name-makers are making names by embodying Forms in some independent way, because this would make all talk about the user unnecessary. If the name-makers were to make names by directly embodying (name-)Forms, they would not need to have the users "in view" (βλέπων, 389a7), as Socrates insists, only the Forms. In such a scenario, the users would also need to adapt to the name-makers' creations and use the names they were given. But this is not how Socrates describes the situation. What he says, instead, is that the name-makers must look to the name-users and make the names so that they correspond to the form of the tool that the users need in a specific context.[24]

Whether or not the name-users – or dialecticians, as they eventually are called (390c11) – are supposed to have some independent or direct relation with the Forms themselves is a vexed question without an explicit answer in Plato's writings.[25] But as long as the art of the name-users is supposed to amount to some kind of search or investigation (e.g. 384c2, see also 391a6) that involves teaching by means of questions and answers (390c10–11), two things are nevertheless reasonably clear. On the one hand, if the name-users have a clear vision of the Forms, the names they are in need of are supposed to function as tools in teaching, and thus to be used in conversations with people who do not share their vision. In that case it would not seem to matter if the names are embodiments of Forms or not, because the pupils would not be able to appreciate that relationship anyway. On the other hand, if the name-users do not have a clear vision of the Forms, and are still searching for them, as seems more likely, they would not be able to judge whether the names are embodiments of Forms or

24 In referring to Socrates' shuttle analogy, Gonzalez draws a similar conclusion: "[T]his analogy is of extreme importance in showing that the nature of a name is to be found in its use". Gonzales, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 68.

25 For discussion and references, see Pettersson "The Legacy of Hermes" or Kirkland, "Logos as the Message From the Gods". For discussion of form and use in this context, see Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 68–69.

not. The names would however still have shapes or forms, and the name-users would still be able to talk about stable things. The only difference would be that forms and stability would correspond less to something over and above and more to something close at hand, such as when Socrates uses the name Hermogenes, with the specific shape of its combined letters, to talk about a person who does not constantly change, namely Hermogenes.

At the end of the day, these points are also reinforced by Socrates' discussion of Forms at the end of the dialogue (439b4–440e7), the only passage that explicitly address Forms as such. Here he suggests that the name-makers "have fallen into a kind of vortex" since the names they have made indicate that all things are in motion and thus impossible to have knowledge about. Insofar as form, in the context of the discussion about name-use, is understood as Form or name-Form, this suggests that name-makers have some kind of prior knowledge about the Forms that they embody in the names. But this presupposes that the names they have made refer to stable things, a claim that Socrates rejects in the concluding discussion.

When it comes to the details, the analogy with the shuttle may be somewhat deceptive, but the basic point should be the same. The user, or weaver, can presumably discriminate the worst exemplars by sight alone, but as it comes to the subtleties, the tools must be put to the trial of use. It is thus using, and not making, that decides what works. For most weavers and dialecticians, similar tools should do, but ultimately the point is still that the tools are to be crafted in accordance with the users' more specific needs. In the case of names, the situation is, of course, more complex than in the case of shuttles, and the needs of the users depend on the context, in the sense that it matters to whom one is talking, the purpose of the talking and the knowledge of the addressee. In general, however, it should not be too farfetched to suggest that when Socrates talks about the names as tools in terms of how they have shapes or forms, the analogy suggests that these forms are not something over and beyond the users' practical needs, but correspond to the names' ability to be used in asking and answering questions in specific contexts.

In other words, and to sum up, the natural correctness of the names does not seem to be a matter of the name-makers' ability to encapsulate descriptive contents in sounds and letters, at least not if Socrates' talk about the user is to make any sense.[26] Their correctness is not determined by their inherent or

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26 If the names are not confined or defined by their material constituents, each should be able to have many meanings and many the same meaning. This is also exactly what Socrates suggests. There are two telling examples: (a) *knowledge* and (b) *king*. (a) Substantiated in terms of his two etymologies of ἐπιστήμη, Socrates concludes that

independent ability to refer to some transcendent reality. The names are in fact not supposed to be understood as independent and self-sustained entities at all. A name can certainly have a referent and refer to some specific stable phenomena, even if it is not able to encapsulate it, but this capacity of referring cannot be judged by looking at the name as an isolated entity. The names are not independent in the sense that their correctness can be judged by their discrete ability to embody or encapsulate some descriptive content. They are instead dependent, and their correctness is to be judged in terms of how well they function in the context they are to be used in.

Evidenced by Socrates' complex argument to this end, the point is however difficult to make and hard to uphold. Yet, it can nevertheless help to explain what he means when he says that language is commercial. Cratylus' joke, that Hermogenes is wrongly named, assumed that names are self-enclosed entities that encapsulate descriptive contents independently of how they will be put to use. In this sense, the names are treated as merchandise that can change hands without loss of meaning. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates warns the young Hippocrates about the sophists' commercial treatment of doctrine (313c), in the *Cratylus* about their commercial treatment of names.

6 Stolen Words

Another of the peculiar characteristics that Socrates associates with language in his etymology of 'Hermes' is that it is thievish (κλοπικόν). In view of Socrates' suggestion that Hermes is the contriver of speech, this may be explained in terms of origin. Two interpretative alternatives are available. Hermes is either the originator of the language of the gods or, like the name-makers, a father of human language. As has been pointed out, since the language of the gods contains no falsehoods, and Hermes is a trickster, the latter is more likely.[27] The

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most, if not all, names are ambiguous (ἀμφίβολος, 437a3). See Trivigno, "Etymology and the Power," 62. (b) Around 394a7, Socrates points out that even if two potions (φάρμακα) can have different appearances, a true doctor can see that they have the same powers. The same goes for names: "[In] Astyanax and Hector, none of the letters is the same, except *t*, but nevertheless they have the same meaning. And what letters has Archepolis (ruler of the city) in common with them? Yet it means the same thing; and there are many other names which mean simply king" (394b6–c4).

27 "[W]ith his propensity to theft and deceit, [he] is mythically identified with the original lawgiver [or name-maker] who instituted human speech", Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 253. So also Ewegen, *Plato's* Cratylus, 40. On Hermes as the god of thieves, see Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of A Myth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1947).

truth of such a mythical identification cannot perhaps be ultimately established, but it is nevertheless possible to draw one minimal conclusion. Even if the origin of the language of the gods is unclear, it is reasonable to assume that human language is said to be contrived by a thief. In accordance with the general principle, common in Plato, that character traits are inherited, human language has thus inherited the thievish character of its father. But what, then, is this supposed to mean?

As has been argued by Andrea Nightingale, one of the *Cratylus*' most important messages is that human language has a propensity for inauthenticity, intellectual theft and imitation.[28] One passage that plays a central role in Nightingale's argument is 413d7–8. Here, Socrates claims that his words are not his own and warns against their deceptive force. "Perhaps I may deceive (ἐξαπατήσαιμι) you", he says, "into thinking that all I am going to say is my own" (413d7–8). Insofar as Socrates is to be trusted here, there are reasons to suspect that his words are stolen. To any reader of a Platonic dialogue, where Socrates is the main speaker, this should come as no surprise. But what may be more surprising is the degree to which the *Cratylus* is permeated with this type of thievish argumentation. Let us take a brief look.

Socrates' affirmative reply to Hermogenes' suggestion that Socrates may be "uttering oracles (χρησμῳδεῖν) [...] like an inspired (ἐνθουσιῶντες) prophet" is a telling example.

> Yes, Hermogenes [Socrates says], and I am convinced that the inspiration came to me from Euthyphro the Prospaltian. For I was with him and listening to him a long time early this morning. So he must have been inspired (ἐνθουσιῶν), and he not only filled my ears but took possession of my soul with his superhuman (δαιμονίας) wisdom. (396d4–8)

Not only does Socrates here affirm that he is uttering oracles like an inspired prophet, but he also locates the source of this inspiration in Euthyphro, who himself was inspired. Even if Socrates leaves the source of Euthyphro's inspiration in the shadows, there are certainly reasons to be suspicious. Indeed, Socrates is quite suspicious of the performance himself, and says:

> I think this is our duty: we ought today to make use of this wisdom [i.e. the inspiration] and finish the investigation of names, but tomorrow, if

28 Nightingale ("Subtext and Subterfuge") often uses the term 'borrow', but I think 'steal' and 'theft' are more on target, since there is no consent involved.

> the rest of you agree, we will conjure it away and purify ourselves, when we have found someone, whether priest or sophist, who is skilled in that kind of purifying. (396d8–397a1)

As Nightingale suggests, Socrates' claim that his soul has been possessed is "deeply ironic".[29] Socrates bases his attempts to uncover the genuine properties of names on a stolen point of view. The general Heraclitian tendency of the etymologies is no less proof of this than his explicit claim that he does not even believe his own arguments:

> My excellent Cratylus, I myself have been marveling at my own wisdom all along, and I cannot believe it. (428d1–2)[30]

Even if Socrates signals that the words he is articulating are not his own, Cratylus does not seem to understand the complexity of Socrates' position. Cratylus does not manage to see Socrates' evasiveness. Instead he is deeply impressed.

> And so, Socrates, your oracular utterances seem to me to be much to my mind, whether you are inspired by Euthyphro or some other Muse has dwelt within you all along without our knowing it. (428c5–7)

In this sense, Socrates and Cratylus are however very similar. When Cratylus now finally begins to speak, it becomes clear that his position is also stolen. It all starts to unravel at 429b12. In order to examine if Cratylus really subscribes to a naturalist theory of names and naming, Socrates asks if Cratylus thinks that Hermogenes' name "is not his name at all, unless he belongs to the race of Hermes, or that it is his name, but is incorrect?" (429b12–c2). Cratylus answers that it is not his name (429c3–5). In the ensuing discussion, there are three telling statements. First, at 429a1, Cratylus claims that the original name-makers are *lawgivers* (νομοθέται). As we have seen, this was a notion Socrates introduced at 389a2 in order to pick up on, and contest, Hermogenes' conventionalist inclinations. Cratylus does not make any comments about this, but

29 Nightingale, "Subtext and Subterfuge," 232.

30 This point is also repeated at 391a4–6: "I, my dear Hermogenes, do not say that there is any [natural correctness of names]. You forget what I said a while ago, that I did not know, but would join you in examining [the matter]" and at 428a6–8: "For that matter, Cratylus, I would not positively affirm any of the things I have said. I merely expressed the opinions which I reached with the help of Hermogenes".

presents the point as his. Second, at 434d9–13, Cratylus repeats Socrates' claim from 414c4–d6 and says that the etymological science may sometimes need to add or remove letters in order to get at the original construction.[31] And third, at 435d4, Cratylus claims that the function of the names is *to teach* (διδάσκειν), a notion that Socrates introduced at 388b13.

In the light of these passages, Nightingale suggests that Cratylus' "language seems […] not to be 'in himself'".[32] Like Socrates' preceding account, large parts of Cratylus' stated position are stolen.[33] But why, then, did Socrates not prevent this from the beginning? As we know from other dialogues, this would not be unsocratic behavior.

According to Nightingale, the answer is a laugh. Socrates, she writes, "mimics and mocks Cratylus' evasiveness" in order to illustrate "the dangers of [stolen] words".[34] Socrates does not only allow Cratylus to go on as an echo, but, to a large extent, also becomes such an echo himself.[35]

When Plato makes Socrates say that one of the central characteristics of human language is its thievish nature, this is likely supposed to function as a warning. The *Cratylus* seems to be designed to make the reader experience the consequences of a discourse solely inhabited by dissembling strangers. Instead of being staged as a friendly conversation between persons with views that emerge from reason and their own serious considerations – the *Cratylus* is a play with stolen voices and words borrowed from others.[36]

7 Deception in Speech

The third noteworthy characteristic that Socrates ascribes to language in his etymology of 'Hermes' has to do with "deception in speech" (ἀπατηλὸν ἐν λόγοις,

31 This, of course, is a trick that Socrates however immediately claimed would result in the fact that "we would be able to fit every word to every thing" (414d7–9). Trivigno's translation, in his "Etymology and the Power".

32 Nightingale, "Subtext and Subterfuge," 231.

33 Nightingale, "Subtext and Subterfuge," 231: "[t]he most obvious illustration of this notion is the fact that his views are put in the mouth of Socrates, who, in turn, ascribes them to Euthyphro".

34 Nightingale, "Subtext and Subterfuge," 233.

35 Alternatively, one may think that Cratylus' position is not stolen from Socrates, but from Heraclitus. Socrates just manages to capture it in a way that Cratylus can endorse. Even if there might be problems with some of Socrates' word choices, e.g. νομοθέτης, since they seem to be chosen to pick up on Hermogenes' conventionalist inclinations, there are reasons to take this line of thought seriously. I owe this remark to Alesia Preite.

36 See Nightingale, "Subtext and Subterfuge," 235.

408a1).[37] The etymology itself – that Ἑρμῆς comes from εἴρειν and ἐμήσατο – contains no further information that could explain this. But Socrates' subsequent remarks about the name Pan (Πὰν) do. Pan is the son of Hermes and since it is no surprise "that brother resembles brother", Pan is "either speech (λόγος) or the brother of speech" (408d2–3). Accordingly, we are not only dealing with everything (τὸ πᾶν), because language or speech means everything (ὁ λόγος τὸ πᾶν σημαίνει), but this is also a twofold (διπλόος) phenomenon (408c2–3): As language makes all things circle around (408c2–3), it has both a true and a false part (408c3). The true part resides up among the gods (408c6) and the false, below, with the human multitude (408c6–7). In contrast to the smooth and divine (408c5) nature of the true part, the false is rough, goatish and tragic (τραχὺ καὶ τραγικόν, 408c7).[38] In contrast to the language of the gods, our language pertains to the tragic life (περὶ τὸν τραγικὸν βίον, 408c8) and is full of tales and falsehoods (οἱ μῦθοί τε καὶ τὰ ψεύδη, 408c8).

To clarify what he means, Socrates goes on to explain that Pan, or the personified all (ὁ πᾶν), is just like speech. Pan always moves around (ἀεὶ πολῶν, 408c10) and is thus "rightly called goat-herd (αἰπόλος)" (408d1). As the double-natured (408b8) son of Hermes, Pan is smooth in his upper parts and rough and goat-like in his lower (τραχὺς καὶ τραγοειδής, 408c10–d2).

Even if a reader may not be fully satisfied with these playful justifications, they are nevertheless explanatory. Language is deceptive because it is double. We humans only have access to the lower realm, but fail to appreciate this fact. As pointed out by Rachel Barney, "we mistake one kind of language for the

37 One important and interesting problem that the etymology of Hermes raises in this context concerns its truth and seriousness. If language is deceptive, to what extent can we trust Socrates' words about this? In the literature, we find various solutions. One scholar puts it like this: "Would it [...] be possible that in examining the name 'Hermes' we are being deceived about the deceptive power of [language]? Clearly not, for then we would be in the impossible situation of being deceived by [language] into thinking that deception on the part of [language] is impossible". Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 252. Another alternative is to think about this in terms of the so-called war of names, a point I owe to David Ebray. Sedley (*Plato's* Cratylus, 98), for example, divides the etymologies into cosmological (397c–410e) and ethical (411a–421c) and claims that only one half of them are seriously meant. On this view, the etymology of Hermes would be one of the serious ones, and language, for Plato, would be deceptive. For discussion, see Trivigno, "Etymology and the Power," 42. As I take it, the dubious or undecided status of Socrates' words is not coincidence. If Plato wanted to show that language can only get us that far and that it cannot ultimately help us to decide what is true and what is false, what better way is there than to make the reader experience exactly that?

38 LSJ has: "[τραγικός] in a double sense, 'τὸ ψευδὲς τραχὺ καὶ τ.' goatlike and tragic".

other, [confuse] the lower discourse for the higher, and take its objects to be the true realities".[39]

The premises for this tragic conclusion are already established at the dialogue's outset. Regarding language and the correctness of names, Socrates explains, Homer says many great and wonderful things (391d6, see also 432b–e). One thing he says is that there is an important difference between human and divine language. While our names are often mistaken, the names used by the gods are always correct (391d8). The river humans call Scamander (Σκάμανδρον), for example, should really be called Xanthus (Ξάνθον); and even if we call the bird cymindis (κύμινδις), the correct and divine name is chalcis (χαλκίδα).

As Socrates continues his etymological enterprise, he leaves little room for doubt. Even if Homer offers the opportunity to investigate the names used by gods, we are left on our own. The names used by the gods are not our business, because these matters are "greater than what you and I can discover" (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἴσως μείζω ἐστὶν ἢ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ ἐξευρεῖν) (392b1–2). As humans, we are left with what is human. Our language is permeated by the shadows of lies. Its deceptive duality constantly misleads us. It does not contain any accessible divine information, and however much we try, it seems, our situation remains tragic.[40]

8 Conclusion

The *Cratylus* is an evasive dialogue. Not only are there reasons to be suspicious of the etymological practice it outlines, but the dialogue's discussion of the relation between reality and language is also ambivalent. Socrates suggests both that we can weave names and verbs together to make beautiful wholes (425a1–2), and that the tragic nature of language makes all such efforts vain. In one sense, however, these perspectives do converge. As we learn from the *Phaedrus*, humans are birds without wings. We know what we would like our language to do. We can imagine what the language of the gods does. But we cannot fly. The commercial, thievish and deceptive characteristics of language correspond to both experiences, and Socrates' etymology of 'Hermes' seems to be designed to make exactly that point. The commercial treatment of language is not odd. We all want our words or names to be perfect, context-independent

39 Barney, *Names and Nature*, 79.
40 *Pace* Kirkland, "Logos as the Message".

encapsulations of ultimate reality. This would make things so much easier. But they are not. And we cannot use someone else's words without a loss of meaning. But we still do, because language is thievish and deceptive. This does not mean that all hope is lost, but it does mean that Socrates might be right. Reality is to be sought through reality and names through names.

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CHAPTER 8

Gorgias and the *Cratylus*

Mariapaola Bergomi

Abstract

The following paper argues that Gorgias, and his anti-eleatic treatise *Peri tou me ontos* (*PTMO*), must be included among the critical points of reference of Plato's *Cratylus* and, although Plato (as well as Aristotle) never mentions the treatise explicitly, that Gorgias' linguistic conventionalism significantly influenced especially the third section of the dialogue and the arguments against Cratylus' naturalism. The paper starts with some considerations on the importance of the *PTMO*, continues highlighting some interesting clues in the dialogue that may point to Gorgias as a philosopher and a philosophical character in Plato, and ends with some references to the arguments against Cratylus and especially to the argument on the impossibility of uttering false statements.

Keywords

Gorgias – sophistry – *PTMO* – conventionalism – falsehood – perception

1 Introduction

In this paper I shall argue that Gorgias must be included among the critical points of reference of the *Cratylus*; moreover, I believe him to be a crucial target of the dialogue like Protagoras, whom Plato explicitly mentions in the dialogue, but also, unlike Protagoras, a positive source for the arguments that Plato further develops in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. Gorgias is of course an anonymous point of reference of the *Cratylus*, since Plato never mentions the sophist in the dialogue, while the dialogue named after the sophist is not primarily concerned with linguistic correctness, but with the nature of rhetoric and its radical difference from philosophy. I shall start with some brief considerations on the relevance of Gorgias' Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος (hereafter *PTMO*) discussing why and to what extent this is relevant for the *Cratylus* in particular; I shall then analyse some specific literary clues in the text of the *Cratylus* which

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may point to Gorgias – including an interpretation of Cratylus' philosophical persona – and I shall conclude by commenting on some key passages of the dialogue which may be closely associated with Gorgias' theory of intentionality and meaning in the second and third part of the *PTMO*.

I have always been puzzled by the absence of references to Gorgias in the commentaries on the dialogue or, rather, of references to Gorgias as the author of the *PTMO*, since in modern scholarship the treatise is almost universally considered a turning point in the evolution of pre-Platonic theories of meaning, something "we cannot afford to brush off lightly".[1] R. Barney mentions Gorgias' Olympic speech once,[2] while F. Ademollo mentions the *Apology of Palamedes* with regard to the rhetorical abilities of the Homeric hero, with reference to *Crat.* 398d5–e3;[3] T. Baxter mentions a very interesting passage of the *Encomium of Helen* where Gorgias draws a distinction between three types of λόγοι: (1) the speeches of the μετεωρολόγοι, (2) the agonistic speeches of the orators and (3) the arguments of philosophers (*Hel. Enc.* 13). As already stressed by Baxter, the use Plato makes of the curious definition for the first name-givers as scientists (or astronomers) of some sort, or pseudo scientists, in *Crat.* 401b7–8, can hardly be accidental and may recall Gorgias' passage. I will come back to this passage of the oration later on.[4]

To my knowledge, Gorgias' *PTMO* is never mentioned in relation to linguistic conventionalism or other topics in the most recent literature on Plato's *Cratylus*; indeed, compared to the overwhelming presence of Protagoras in relation to ontological relativism, Gorgias seems to play a secondary role in other dialogues as well. It has to be noted in the first place that both Plato and Aristotle (who also never mentions the *PTMO*) are silent on the treatise: however, even if they both dismissed the philosophical relevance of this work, it is nearly impossible that they didn't know and read either the original or an early paraphrase of it, since contemporaries such as Isocrates and Antisthenes – both allegedly pupils of Gorgias' – referred to his anti-Eleatic theses. Isocrates especially refers to Gorgias' ontology in the orations *Helen* and *Antidosis*, the latter being perhaps the most philosophical of his compositions. Claiming a

1 Victor Caston, "Gorgias on Thought and its Objects," in *Presocratic Philosophy*: *Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos*, ed. Victor Caston and Daniel W. Graham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 207.

2 Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 66, in reference to DK82B8 (Clem. *Stromata* I 11, 51, 3, 1–5)

3 Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 247.

4 Timothy Baxter, *The* Cratylus*: Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1992), 140.

role for Gorgias and the *PTMO* in the *Cratylus* may sound either misguided for the reason just mentioned, that is that both Plato and Aristotle seem to deliberately ignore the treatise, or even fatally dangerous because of the nature of the work itself.

Indeed, the fact that the treatise survived through the two paraphrases contained in Ps. Aristotle's *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* 979a12–980b21 (hereafter *MXG*) and Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos* VII 65–87 needs careful handling and raises uncomfortable questions of authorship and chronology. We do not know with certainty the date of composition of the *PTMO*: all we have is one explicit mention of the date of a treatise called Περὶ φύσεως which corresponds to the *PTMO* in Olympiodorus (*In Gorg.* 9, 4–16), who claims that the treatise was composed during the 84th Olympiad (444–441 BC) and who interestingly defines it as an οὐκ ἄκομψον σύγγραμμα.[5] Scholars are divided on the date of composition; the majority of them consider it a work from Gorgias' youth[6] (around 460 BC, if we accept that he was born in the years 485–480, when also Antiphon of Rhamnus was born, who was roughly same age as Gorgias according to Ps. Plutarch); others consider it the work of a mature thinker.

The chronological uncertainty especially affects the interpretation of the anonymous *MXG*, since scholars have very different opinions about the authorship and the date of composition of this work as well; the treatise has been variously attributed to a doxographer,[7] a Peripatetic scholar (3rd century BC),[8] Theophrastus,[9] a thinker belonging to the Megaric school,[10] and even a late Aristotelian with strong sceptic, Pyrrhonizing influences.[11] The *MXG* and

5 Literally "a not unadorned treatise".

6 Among them: Wilhelm Nestle, "Die Schrift des Gorgias 'Über die Natur oder über das Nichtseiende'," *Hermes* 57 (1922); Henry Maier, *Sokrates: Sein Werk und seines geschichtliche* Stellung, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913); Mario Untersteiner, ed., *I Sofisti. Testimonianze e Frammenti*. (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1949); Hans-Joachim Newiger, *Untersuchungen zu Gorgias' Schrift* Über das Nichtseiende (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973); Maurizio Migliori, *La filosofia di Gorgia. Contributi per una riscoperta del sofista di Lentini* (Milano: Celuc, 1973).

7 Barbara Cassin, *Si Parménide: Le traité anonyme De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* (Lille: Cahiers de Philologie (IV), 1980).

8 The majority of scholars seem to converge on this hypothesis. Among them: Hermann Diels, "Gorgias und Empedocles," *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 19, 1 (1879); Olof Gigon, "Gorgias "Über das Nicht-sein," *Hermes* 71 (1936); Newiger, *Untersuchungen zu Gorgias* (1974); Roberta Ioli, ed., *Gorgia di Leontini: Su ciò che non è*, Testo greco, traduzione e commento (Zürich: Olms, 2010).

9 Heinrich Gomperz, *Sophistik und Rhetorik* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914).

10 Mario Untersteiner, "Senofane e Melisso nel De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia. Una polemica megarica?" *Antiquitas* 8 (1950).

11 Jaap Mansfeld, "De Melisso Xenophane Gorgias. Pyrrhonizing Aristotelianism," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 131 (1988).

Sextus' version of the PTMO are two distinct sources possibly deriving from the same archetype, but with independent textual transmissions. The major difference between the two versions is the structure of the first demonstration that "Being and Not-Being no more are than are not".[12] The Anonymous divides the first demonstration into two parts, the "special" demonstration (πρῶτος λόγος or ἴδιος ἀπόδειξις), followed by a response, and the synthetic demonstration (δεύτερος λόγος or συνθετική ἀπόδειξις), in which Gorgias overthrows the arguments of Eleatic thinkers (Zeno and Melissus) but also, according to some scholars, those of Leucippus. The third section of the treatise presents a more complex structure in *MXG*, which seems to stress much more the impossibility of two speakers sharing perceptions and thoughts, and the impossibility for a single individual to grasp his/her own thoughts in the same way at different times.

The PTMO seems to be concerned with two different questions, namely whether Being and Not-being can be said to exist or not, in the first section, and what the status of objects of perceptions is, in the second and third sections. However, as pointed out for the first time by Calogero (*Studi sull'Eleatismo*, 1922) and further maintained and developed by Kerferd, Mourelatos *et alii*, the question at issue is not the very existence of Being and Not-Being, but whether the verb "to be" can be predicated of phenomena without leading to contradictions;[13] moreover, Gorgias seems to be perfectly aware of the coexistence of the different meanings of the verb "to be" and consciously builds his arguments by playing on the confusion between the existential and the predicative meaning of εἶναι. While the Anonymous seems to consciously use the form τὸ εἶναι/τὸ μὴ εἶναι when reporting Gorgias' special demonstration, Sextus makes use of the post-Platonic form τὸ ὄν/τὸ μὴ ὄν.

While the first section of the treatise anticipates some crucial arguments of Plato's *Sophist* and seems to me to be an indispensable source for the parricide of Parmenides (although quite surprisingly, the PTMO is not frequently mentioned in the commentaries on this dialogue as well), the second and the third sections of the treatise are especially meaningful in relation to the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*. As Victor Caston correctly pointed out, whereas Gorgias in section I is ambiguously fluctuating between the existential and the predicative meaning of the verb "to be", in section II he consciously plays on the verb

12 Trans. by George B. Kerferd, "Gorgias 'On Nature or That Which is Not'," *Phronesis* 1 (1955): 13.

13 Guido Calogero, *Studi sull'Eleatismo* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1922); Kerferd, "Gorgias 'On Nature or That Which is Not'"; Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, "Gorgias on the Function of Language," *Philosophical Topics* 15 (1987); Caston, "On Thought"; Ioli, *Gorgia di Leontini*.

"to know", oscillating between an intentional and an epistemic conception of γιγνώσκειν.[14] Indeed, Sextus seems to stress the intentional reading by adding the participial ἀνεπινόητον to ἄγνωστον in the first line. This section, moreover, anticipates the issue of the radical distinction between sensory domains (sight and hearing) and the mental images of external things, something Gorgias insists on in section III too. Needless to say, the third section is the most interesting one for the purposes of the present paper, and it presents a number of very noteworthy passages both in *MXG* and in Sextus which deserve careful consideration. The last section of the treatise not only takes up and applies to spoken language the principle of the irreducibility of the sensory domains already anticipated in section II, but also gives us a picture of Gorgias' conception of meaning. According to Mourelatos, who was followed by Consigny *et alii*, Gorgias not only distinguishes between a conception of linguistic meaning as reference and a conception of linguistic meaning as a mental image of external things, but endorses a peculiar "behavioural" view which must be considered in relation to his *Helen* and *Palamedes* as well.[15]

2 Where's the Hidden Sophist?

I have already mentioned the fact that both Plato and Aristotle are silent on Gorgias' *PTMO*: on the surface, they both confine Gorgias to the role of rhetor and seem to deprive his production of all pregnant philosophical significance. However, the influence of the *PTMO* on Plato in particular seems to me undeniable in the aforementioned dialogues and elsewhere. In a very interesting paper, Roberta Ioli tries to answer the question of why Plato and Aristotle never mentioned the treatise and of how many actual, yet not explicit, references to it are traceable in their works.[16] According to Ioli, Plato's choice

14 Caston, "On Thought," 6 ff. "He is making a claim about intentionality, denying that our mental states can ever be about anything. Alternatively, 'know' might signal a higher epistemic achievement [...] when the verb to know is used in this manner (epistemic), it only signifies a specific way of grasping something, and not our ability to grasp items in general". See also the meaning of φρονεῖσθαι in the sense of "having something in mind" "conceive something" (intentional reading).

15 Mourelatos, "Function of Language", Scott Consigny, *Gorgias. Sophist and Artist.* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Robert Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato and their successors* (London: Routledge, 1996); Ioli, *Giorgia di Leontini.*

16 Roberta Ioli, "Il silenzio di Platone e Aristotele sul Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος di Gorgia," *Dianoia* 12 (2007).

was not meant to be mere censorship but a method of integrating a source. Whereas the influence of Gorgias in Plato's description of the power of rhetorical λόγος (in the *Phaedrus* for instance) is made explicit, the source is somehow integrated but covered and kept hidden in contexts where, on the one hand, Protagoras' relativism and Eleatic philosophy are tested and "lightly tortured", and, on the other, Gorgias' conventionalism on language and meaning seems to come to the surface.[17] As Ioli claims, Gorgias' influence needs to be emphasized especially in those dialogues dedicated to the discussion of being, perceptions, and language, namely the *Parmenides*, *Sophist* and *Theaetetus*.[18] To my mind, the *Cratylus* must be added to this list. The case of the *Parmenides* is perhaps the clearest, as already stressed by Mansfeld, Palmer, Dixsaut *et alii*.[19] The "Greatest Difficulty" Argument challenges Socrates on the fatal irreducibility of ideas and the impossibility for them to be known and communicated by human beings, an impossibility that affects the ideas and the gods as well, who cannot know anything of human affairs; but it's in the dialogue between Parmenides and the young Aristotle that we find the strongest echoes of the arguments of the *PTMO* (especially of the arguments contained in the so called synthetic demonstration), such as the paradoxes of multiplicity, change, and movement at *Parm.* 137d7–138b6 and 138b7–e4.[20] At 137d7 ff, Plato seems to be perfectly aware of Gorgias' argument on generation, which we read in *MXG* 979b21–26 and in Sextus, *Adv. math.* VII 69–70.

Also because of its strong links to the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, I believe that the *Cratylus* contains references to Gorgias' *PTMO* and illustrates a peculiar strategy of interpretation and appropriation, by Plato, of the anti-Eleatic arguments of the treatise. But I also think that we can find some minor references in the dialogue that might remind us of Gorgias as Plato depicts him and as other testimonies seem to describe him. Both ancient biographers and Plato inform us that Gorgias' brother was a well-known physician named Herodicus.[21] Moreover, the sophist himself explains in a crucial passage of the

17 Ioli, "Il silenzio," 12 ("Ovviamente il nome del sofista è taciuto: sarebbe impensabile che Platone, servendosi della medesima strategia impiegata da Gorgia in funzione antieleatica, ammettesse il proprio debito").

18 Ioli, "Il silenzio," 11.

19 Jaap Mansfeld, "Historical and philosophical aspects of Gorgias' *On What is Not*," *Siculorum Gymnasium* 38 (1985): 258–263; Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric*, 154; John A. Palmer, *Plato's Reception of Parmenides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 109–117; Monique Dixsaut, "Platon et la leçon de Gorgias: pouvoir tout dire de l'être, ne rien pouvoir dire de ce qui est," in *Platon source des Présocratiques: Exploration*, ed. Monique Dixsaut, Aldo Brancacci (Paris: Vrin, 2002), 193–209.

20 See Appendix I in Palmer, *Plato's Reception*, 255–6.

21 See Diogenes Laertius, VIII 58–59, and also Suidas s.v. Γοργίας.

Gorgias (456b3) that he used to accompany his brother and other doctors to the house of those scared patients who didn't want to take medicines and have their skin incised and cauterized; Gorgias explains to Socrates that he was able to convince the patients with his rhetorical art, being even more useful than a doctor, who nonetheless possesses the technical skills:

> many and many a time have I gone with my brother or other doctors to visit one of their patients, and found him unwilling either to take medicine or submit to the surgeon's knife or cautery; and when the doctor failed to persuade him I succeeded, by no other art than that of rhetoric. (*Grg*. 456b1–5)

As we know, Socrates has just asked Gorgias about the power of rhetoric and the ability of the rhetor to give advice in any field, and Gorgias has just mentioned the case of the Athenian walls, built under the advice of Themistocles and Pericles, neither of whom were actually experts on architecture and building materials.[22] The refutation of Protagoras' doctrine in the first part of the *Cratylus* (a doctrine Hermogenes doesn't want to endorse but one he knows well because of his step-brother Callias), is based on the Socratic argument of the non-relativistic nature of things and actions (πράξεις), which have to be performed according to a specific pattern and accomplished by means of a naturally suitable instrument. From 387a to 388a Socrates wants to have Hermogenes agree on the fact that the actions of τέμνειν (to cut = to incise), καύειν (to burn = cauterize), and ὀνομάζειν work according to the specific nature of cutting, burning, naming, of being cut, burned, and named, and of the instrument by means of which each of them is performed:

> Then actions also are performed according to their own nature, not according to our opinion. For instance, if we undertake to cut anything, ought we to cut it as we wish, and with whatever instrument we wish, or shall we, if we are willing to cut each thing in accordance with the nature of cutting and being cut, and with the natural instrument, succeed in cutting it, and do it rightly, whereas if we try to do it contrary to nature we shall fail and accomplish nothing?[23]

22 See Plato, *Grg.* 455b ff.
23 *Crat.* 387a1–8.

As F. Ademollo correctly points out, the association of the two verbs τέμνειν and καύειν "can hardly be accidental, given that cutting and burning are constantly associated surgical practices",[24] also mentioning *Gorgias* 456b. I believe we can push this suggestion even further and translate the verbs in a technical way – as "to incise" and to "cauterize" – rather than according to their generic meaning of cutting and burning. Given that both the passage from the *Gorgias* and this passage of the *Cratylus* are concerned with the non-relativistic nature of things and actions, and given that Gorgias' refutation in the dialogue of the same name is based on the difference between an actual τέχνη (ἐπιστήμη) – which needs to follow patterns and rules and is not based on persuasion alone – and a mere πραγματέια (which turns out to be, in the case of rhetoric, a shadow of politics), I think we can claim that Plato is consciously echoing himself and perhaps the real Gorgias as well. Moreover, the analogy between the two passages is reinforced, I think, by the definition Socrates gives of the name at 388c, "A name is, then, an instrument of teaching and of separating reality …" (ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστιν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν); indeed, at *Grg.* 458e–459a, Socrates challenges Gorgias about the teaching of rhetoric and the ability of the rhetor to make a crowd of ignorant people wise only by means of persuasion based on πίστις as opposed to knowledge. Socrates insists on the opposition between a (good) persuasion based on teaching, and a persuasion based on belief, although in both cases λόγοι are involved:

> Thus rhetoric, it seems, is a producer of persuasion for belief, not for teaching in the matter of right and wrong.[25]

In the first section I mentioned an interesting passage from Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* 13–14 quoted by T. Baxter in relation to *Cra.* 401b7–8:

> One may learn first from the words of the astronomers (μετεωρολόγοι), who, substituting opinion for opinion, taking away one but creating another, make what is incredible and unclear seem true to the eyes of opinion; and second, compelling contests in words […] and third, the struggle of philosophic arguments.[26]

24 Ademollo, *Commentary*, 99–100.

25 *Grg.* 455a (W. R. M. Lamb translation in Loeb).

26 See Baxter, *Cratylus*, 140 ("Astronomers and cosmologists arguing about the structure of the universe disagree; the only way they can make their particular theories attractive to the ordinary person is the persuasive rhetoric, the answer being hidden to men.")

The definition used by Gorgias for the scientists concerned with the first kind of discourse (λόγος) finds no parallels before this work and it's very interestingly connected to the concept of chattering (ἀδολεσχία) in the *Cratylus*, where the first name-givers are said to be astronomers and chatterers (μετεωρολόγοι καὶ ἀδολέσχαι τινές). Ἀδολεσχία appears elsewhere in Plato with a slight negative nuance and in connection to sky-talking;[27] we find it in Aristophanes' *Clouds* as well, where Socrates is lampooned for his doctrines in natural philosophy, most probably inspired by Archelaus and Diogenes of Apollonia.[28] Both Gorgias and Plato seem to claim that scientists or pseudo-scientists use language rhetorically to convince people of the truth of their observations and doctrines; in the case of the *Cratylus*, the name-giving performed by the first Nomothetai (who were also star-gazers) turns out to be a way to convey a cosmological doctrine, as in the case of the name of Hestia, that Socrates is about to comment on.

Gorgias' *PTMO* was written also (according to some scholars, primarily) for the purpose of lampooning a specific version of Eleatism, namely the dialectical defence performed by Zeno and Melissus. The title of the treatise itself, Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ περὶ φύσεως as handed down by Sextus, is almost universally considered the reversal of Melissus' Περὶ φύσεως ἢ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος.[29] According to some scholars (who nonetheless form "a growing minority")[30] this attitude towards an "extreme Eleatism" would characterize Plato's *Parmenides* as well. Moreover, this attitude would be shared by early comic playwrights, such as Epicharmus – explicitly mentioned by Plato, for instance, in the *Theaetetus*, as one of the supporters of the theory of flux at *Tht*. 152e – and Cratinus, who was heavily influenced by Epicharmus and was the author of *Panoptai*, a comedy containing an early reference to Parmenides which was probably well known to Plato himself, and which served as a model for the portrayal of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Interestingly, according to an old study by N. Demand, there are traces in the extant fragments of Epicharmus of a comic representation of Gorgias as well: according to her analysis, fragment 254 (Kaibel) would belong to the comedy *Logos and Logina* and would portray

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27 See *Phd*. 70c; *Resp*. VI 488e–489a, 489c; *Pol*. 299b. See also Ademollo, *Commentary*, 202 on this point.

28 Gábor Betegh, "Socrate et Archélaos dans Les Nuées. Philosophie naturelle et étique," in *Comédie et Philosophie: Socrate et les Présocratique dans les* "Nuées" *d'Aristophane*, ed. André Laks and Rosella Saetta Cottone (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2013).

29 See Ioli, *Gorgia di Leontini*, 11–14.

30 Andrea Capra, Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, "Riding from Elea to Athens (via Syracuse). The Parmenides and the early reception of Eleatism: Epicharmus, Cratinus and Plato," *Méthexis* 24 (2011): 135.

Palamedes uttering a prophecy on Gorgias taking his defence, by means of an elegant prose adorned with purple garment.[31]

Without pushing the argument too far, I would say that, among other critical targets of the *Cratylus,* Plato has Eleatism in mind and that, like Gorgias, he is criticizing some aspects of Eleatic philosophy by means of a "serious parody"; however, unlike Gorgias, Plato never seems to forget his indebtedness to Parmenides, who clearly outclassed his pupils. I would like to argue that, as in the aforementioned *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, in the *Cratylus* Plato resorts to Gorgias' mediation to combine a serious discussion of some crucial doctrines – such as the impossibility of uttering false statements, which I shall consider in the third section – and a semi-serious portrayal of his predecessors, something that can be said in the case of the etymologies too. Indeed, there is little doubt that in the etymological section and indeed throughout the dialogue Plato provides many hints and allusions to the Presocratics.

This indeed risky hypothesis requires some textual support, and I believe that we can find it in two ways: (i) by considering Cratylus' role as a philosophical character; (ii) by discussing the relevant passages in which the anti-Eleatic critique of Gorgias meets the definition of Plato's linguistic conventionalism. Cratylus is undoubtedly a mysterious character and little is known about his life and doctrine – assuming he had one. The little we know about Cratylus doesn't help us unlock the mystery of the dialogue and hence to understand why Plato chose to name this work on language and names after his friend (συνήθης), according to Aristotle (*Met.* I 6, 987a30). We have some valuable testimonies from Aristotle *Met.* I 6, 987a32–b7, *Met.* IV 5, 1010a7–15 and *Rhet.* III 16, 1417b1–3 informing us, respectively, that Plato became acquainted with Cratylus and Heracliteanism in his young age, before meeting Socrates, that Cratylus was so deeply convinced that the material world was fatally subject to an eternal flux that he was unable to speak and could only point things with his finger, and finally (according to Aeschines of Sphettus) that he used gestures *while* speaking, but not *instead* of speaking. These descriptions of Cratylus, though crucial, puzzle us instead of helping us to understand the philosophical persona of Cratylus and his role in the dialogue. Indeed, the testimonies do not really explain why a radical Heraclitean like Cratylus would (i) agree with Socrates on etymologies which are not based on the idea of an eternal and chaotic flux (indeed, it is certainly not true that all etymologies are based on this idea); (ii) endorse, as stated by Hermogenes, a naturalistic theory of language in which there is always one and only one name for any given thing;

31 Nancy Demand, "Epicharmus and Gorgias," *American Journal of Philology* 93, 3 (1971).

or (iii) agree on the fact the names are means to express (δηλώματα) all sort of things (*Crat.* 423b ff).

According to D. Sedley, who builds on G. Kirk's thesis,[32] Cratylus actually became a supporter of Heracliteanism after meeting Socrates and indeed after discussing these topics with him. This hypothesis would explain why Cratylus is somehow philosophically confused and why he remains silent for most of the time. However, I think that this hypothesis underestimates Cratylus' role, which does not match, to my mind, his behaviour in the dialogue. Cratylus does not seem intimidated at all, nor does seem eager to learn from Socrates as Hermogenes does. He is said to speak enigmatically and to use obscure but elegant expressions (*Crat.* 429d), and he seems to appreciate the references to religious inspirations, as in the case of Euthyphro (*Crat.* 428c). More recently, Pierre Ponchon has taken up and elaborated upon Kirk's theses and proposed a very interesting picture of Cratylus.[33] Ponchon proposes a study of Cratylus' life and philosophical ideas in three phases. The first is a Heraclitean phase in which he devoted himself to the study of names and etymologies in order to find the λόγος in every expression; the second is a radical Heraclitean phase in which he exclusively used ῥήματα and expressions indicating movement and becoming; and the third is a phase in which he reached aphasia, for the impossibility of choosing any sound or word to grasp the flowing reality without falling into contradiction. According to Ponchon, the third phase would be the consequence of the significant influence of Eleatic speculation in Athens, and especially of Zeno.[34] Cratylus' silence would be compatible to Zeno's paradoxes on movement and change: indeed, if you wish to maintain both that becoming exists and that language is language (and names are names) only insofar as it unfailingly expresses things, you will end up silent since things cannot be grasped by a language, which is always slower than changing things.[35]

32 David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16–21; Geoffrey S. Kirk, "The Problem of *Cratylus*," *American Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1951): 225–253.

33 Pierre Ponchon, "*Cratyle* et la réception d'Héraclite à Athènes," *Méthexis* 24 (2011).

34 Ponchon, "Cratyle," 47.

35 Ponchon, "Cratyle," 61–63 ("On se retrouverait alors dans le cas du paradoxe d'Achille. La difficulté principale de cette hypothèse tient à ce que les arguments de Zénon sont destinés à prouver, contre l'expérience commune, l'impossibilité du mouvement dans le cas d'une hypothèse pluraliste, et, donc, à disqualifier cette hypothèse pluraliste, probablement d'origine pythagoricienne, tandis que Cratyle disqualifie le langage, mais pas le mouvement […] C'est donc le caractère infinitésimal du changement pur combiné à la nature discrète du langage qui rend impossibile de combler le retard; ce n'est pas la différence de vitesse qui est en jeu, mais la nature même des deux flux").

If this picture is even partially correct, Plato's choice of Cratylus as the spokesperson for linguistic naturalism in the dialogue would make sense and would indicate, I think, Plato's concern to draw a contrast between language and reality – further developed in the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*. Indeed, the radical division between being, perceptions, and language is precisely the topic of Gorgias' treatise. Cratylus' linguistic naturalism also implies some unacceptable consequences for Plato, as we understand from his refutation in the third section of the dialogue I am about to discuss. On the other hand, the stubbornness of the young boy – as Plato depicts him – and the way he chooses to expresses himself in a quasi oracular style, also using subtle expressions recalling the speech of those whom Plato labels as κομψότεροι (*Crat.* 429e, *Tht.* 156a3), suggests that Cratylus represents more than himself, and that he stands as a good target for Plato's critique of his predecessors – actually amounting to a very serious philosophical parody.

3 Perception, Imitation and Falsehood: Plato's Conventionalism and the *PTMO*

As I have said, the *Parmenides*, along with the *Sophist*, is the dialogue in which Gorgias' influence is strongest and the echoes of the *PTMO* are clearest: indeed, a consistent support to my thesis comes from John P. Palmer's discussion of "sophistic Parmenideanism" in his book *Plato's Reception of Parmenides*. Palmer explicitly mentions the *Cratylus* many times in connection to the *PTMO* and reads the accounts of falsehood of the *Euthydemus*, the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist* in connection to Gorgias' treatise.[36] *Euthydemus* 283e7–286b6 presents a number of arguments formulated by the eristic brothers, designed to demonstrate the impossibility of falsehood and contradiction. This text has actually been mentioned many times in relation to *Crat.* 429d1–6, where Socrates tells his interlocutor that his position (a name, if it is a name, is *ipso facto* a correct one) implies the impossibility of uttering false statements:[37]

36 John A. Palmer, *Plato's Reception of Parmenides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 124 ff.

37 For instance by Nick Denyer, *Language, Thought and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991): 68–82, followed by Barney, *Names and Nature*, 177–179; Ademollo, *Commentary*, 326–332.

SOCR. Speaking falsehood is altogether impossible, isn't this what your theory entails? For, my dear Cratylus, those who say so are quite numerous, both nowadays and in the past.

CRAT. How could someone speaking of that which he is speaking of not "say what is" (τὸ ὂν λέγοι)? Or isn't this what making false statements is, "not saying what is" (τὸ μὴ τὰ ὄντα λέγει)?[38]

As Palmer correctly notes, the use of the participial forms τὸ ὄν and τὰ ὄντα cannot be accidental and is consciously chosen by Plato in order to recall the ambiguity of the Greek idiom, since the expression "to say what is (the case)" – τὰ ὄντα λέγειν – can be used to mean "to speak the truth". In the *Euthydemus*, the first argument at 283e7–284a8 "is designed to show that everyone always tells the truth", since when we are talking, even talking of something (s1) which is not something else (s2), we speak of (s1) as existent even if it is not something else, namely (s2). The confusion generated by the coexistence of being and non-being is of course based, as I have already mentioned, on the conscious lack of distinction between the existential and the predicative sense of the verb "to be", a confusion (*secundum quid* fallacy) on which the paradoxes of the first section of the *PTMO*, both in *MXG* and Sextus, are based.

In the *Cratylus*, Socrates seems very concerned about the possibility of uttering both true and false statements and wants first Hermogenes and then Cratylus to fully agree on this point. Despite the puzzling position of this passage, which in the past led some scholars to hypothesise that it was out of place,[39] the portion of the text on "true speech" (ἀληθής λόγος) in *Cra.* 385b–d seems perfectly coherent and integrated in the dialogue, since the possibility of distinguishing a true λόγος from a false one is potentially the key to refute both the extreme conventionalism based on the ontological relativism of Protagoras, and the radical naturalism. By these I mean both that the emphasis on the existence of a "true logos" can rule out a form of "anything goes conventionalism", and that the emphasis on the existence of a "false logos" can rule out naïve conceptions of naturalism but also some eristic absurdities (as shown by the *Euthydemus*). Gorgias, however, goes further and in section II of the *PTMO* also argues that contents of thought cannot have a truth-value. Indeed, as Gorgias states, how can we justify the existence outside our mind of non-existent things like "chariots running on the sea", or "winged men"?

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38 Trans. J. A. Palmer.

39 Malcolm Schofield, "A Displacement in the Text of the *Cratylus*," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972). On this problematic passage, see in particular Ademollo, *Commentary*, 68–72.

> For if things that are thought are beings, all things that are thought are – however anyone thinks them – which does not seem right. For it is not the case that if someone thinks of a human flying or chariots speeding over the ocean, a human *is* right away flying or chariots *are* speeding over the ocean. So it is not the case that things that are thought are beings.[40]

It has been argued, the examples of the winged men (mentioned in Sextus only) and the chariots on the sea might have inspired the example of Theaetetus sitting/flying in the *Sophist*, where Socrates is making his point about truth and falsehood in statements with different predicates (provided that Sextus did not add this example to that of the chariots from *MXG* with reference to Plato).

Whereas section I of Gorgias' *PTMO* looks more like the *pars destruens* of the treatise, entirely dedicated as it is to dialectical refutation, section II and especially section III, while conceived as bold critiques as well, seem to contain more philosophically "positive" material adduced by Gorgias in support of his view on the radical distinction between sensory perceptions, intellective cognition, and language. While section I is not designed to communicate anything more than the inevitable logical contradictions that necessarily come with the misuse of philosophical expressions, in section III Gorgias seems to endorse a conventionalist view of language which is based on assuming: (i) the impossibility of having a perfectly correct word to convey a given thing or thought (words cannot "show" a meaning); (ii) the distinction between sensory domains and the consequent impossibility to translate perceptions into words or speeches (λόγοι); (iii) the impossibility of sharing the exact same mental content with another person by means of language, given that things or mental representations of them cannot be divided and enter into different subjects (as I understand it, a sort of anticipation of the "Greatest Difficulty" of Plato's *Parmenides*, referred to human beings: thoughts cannot be "shared" because they exist as unities in themselves only in the mind of a single thinker); (iv) the impossibility, even for a single human being, of experiencing the same mental content at different times, with the consequence that it is impossible to communicate a given mental content to another person as it was in the beginning. Let us get a closer look at the text:

> For how could a man express in words what he has seen? Or how could a thing be clear to a man who heard it, if he has not seen it? For just as

40 Sextus Empiricus*, Adv. math.* VII 79 (trans. R. Bett). On this passage see also Victor Caston, "Gorgias on Thought and its Objects," in *Presocratic Philosophy. Essays in honour of Alexander Mourelatos*, ed. Victor Caston and Daniel Graham (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing, 2002).

> sight is not the sense which recognizes sounds, so hearing cannot hear colours, but only sounds; and the speaker speaks, but he does not speak a colour or a thing […] For, to begin with, no one speaks a sound or a colour, but only a word (or discourse, λόγος); so that it is not possible to think a colour but only to see it, nor to think a sound, but only to hear it.
>
> Granting, then, that it is possible to know and read a word (or discourse, λόγος), how can the hearer share the same mental content (ἐννοήσειν) of the speaker? For it is impossible for the same thing to exist in several separate persons; for then the one would be two […]
>
> But not even a single individual in himself seems to perceive similar things at the same time, but different things with his hearing and with his vision, and different again at the moment and long ago, so that one person can hardly perceive the same things as another. Thus if anything exists, it cannot be known, and if it is indeed known, no one could show it to another human being; because things are not words, and because nobody thinks the same things as another. (*MXG* 980a20–980b20)[41]
>
> For what we communicate with is speech (or discourse, λόγος), but speech does not correspond to existing beings; therefore it is not the beings that we communicate to our neighbours, but speech instead, which is different from the existing things. Just as the visible, then, could not become audible, and conversely, so what is, since it exists externally, could not become our speech. And if it is not speech it cannot be disclosed to someone else. Again, speech … is constituted from the external objects that strike us – that is, from perceptible things. (Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. math*. VII 84–85)[42]

The passages just quoted contain much extraordinary material: for my purposes, I will focus on three aspects in relation to the *Cratylus*, namely: (i) Gorgias' thesis of the irreducibility of the sensory domains and Plato's point on the descriptive nature of speech; (ii) the sensistic theory of language as described by Gorgias, with reference to Empedocles, Plato's *Meno* and the argument of phonetic elements in the *Cratylus*; (iii) the impossibility of showing

41 Trans. W. S. Hett, modified.

42 Trans. R. Bett, modified.

(δηλοῦν) the essence of things by means of a discourse and Socrates' characterization of names as "means to express" (δηλώσεις/δηλώματα).

(i) Gorgias argues in favour of a radical separation between sensory domains (hearing is designed for sounds, sight for colours and so on) in order to negate any link between words and the things they signify. Speech (λόγος) being radically different from the external things in the world but also from our five senses, is not able to grasp the existing things and translate them to the senses; indeed, a person who hears a word, does not simply hear a sound, but a meaningful word that doesn't correspond to a mere sound or to the thing signified by the word. As a consequence, when I hear the word "red", I cannot build in my mind the mental image of the colour red, but only of the word itself or something mediated by this linguistic translation.[43] This characterization of the ontological status of *logos* is reminiscent of Gorgias' later works and, I think, of his use of the concepts of image and likeness. At *Crat.* 423d, Plato claims that names are not imitations like music, which can *only* transmit sounds, or painting, which can *only* transmit colours but are able to imitate essences. He is in fact saying that names can imitate anything, since in so far as each thing deserves the predicate of being (ταύτης τῆς προσρήσεως, τοῦ εἶναι 423e4) it has an essence – which counts also for colours and sounds. Therefore, the ontological status of names – I would speak of individual "names" here rather than logos in general – does not represent a restriction (or limitation) nor a problem since this is precisely what allows words to signify things, that is the ability to refer to every essence and not to mere aspects of reality.[44]

(ii) One of the most difficult aspects of Gorgias' discussion of meaning in the third section of the *PTMO* is, without any doubt, the issue of how to combine his conventionalism – meaning the theory according to which speech does not convey things or their essence or even a mental image of things – with his theory of perception based on effluences and pores, allegedly a legacy from Empedocles' teaching.[45] If we carefully read the text preserved in Sextus Empiricus*, Adv. math.* VII 84–85, Gorgias seems to endorse a sensistic theory of language (meaning, generally speaking, a theory according to which language has its primary origin in a perceptive stimulus coming from the external world, and making an impression upon our senses or soul), which many scholars believe to be genuine on the basis of the words of Plato's *Meno* 76c4–e4 and other testimonies, such as Theophrastus, *De igne* 73. The *Cratylus,* on the other hand, seems to make reference to a similar theory when Socrates challenges

43 See also *Tht.* 163b.

44 See *Crat.* 423e.

45 Ioli, *Gorgia di Leontini*, 56–60.

those views according to which: (a) a name is a vocal imitation of the thing named (423b9–10) and (b) the naturally correct elements that compose names are based on extra-linguistic feelings and perception, which seems clear from the description of the phonetic elements in *Crat.* 426 ff.

(iii) The first part of the third thesis of the *PTMO* in the *MXG* version is, to me, the most interesting and challenging of all because of the language the Anonymous uses to describe the impossibility for words to disclose and show the things we experience in the external world. I am especially interested in the example of sight and the use of δηλοῦν (to show) to address the idea that language cannot convey the object of sight if the interlocutor didn't see anything. The next lines (in Sextus as well) confirm the idea of the distance between the objects we can get to know through the senses and the opacity of the linguistic screen. It is not only that language cannot grasp reality because it cannot really describe it or because the external world is always changing too fast to be grasped by us (the relation between language and time being a recurrent topic not only in the *Cratylus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* but also, interestingly, in the *Timaeus*, where it is discussed at 37d-38a and 49d-50a), but also because things in the external world can be known in their physical existence only through the non-mediated activity of the senses. In a number of passages of the *Cratylus*. Plato uses the verb 'showing' (δηλοῦν) and its derivatives in order to address the idea of a communication which is powerful and somehow related to the bodily aspect of language (such as gestures), but not entirely transparent as we might expect from a name which is said to be perfectly "correct". At *Crat.* 423b ff, for instance, Plato describes a scene in which two speakers are addressing each other with gestures of the arms to signify objects or situations in the external world. As Socrates states, in this case a δήλωμα (literally, "means to express") comes to be by means of the body. Δήλωμα, possibly Plato's coinage, is an interesting noun which comes out again later on in the dialogue (*Crat.* 433b–d, 434e) and it is possibly reminiscent of Gorgias' use of the verb δηλοῦν. Indeed, Plato seems to use the definition of the name as a δήλωμα not only to address the idea of a correctness by nature, but also to emphasise the ambiguous ontological status of language.[46]

A more attentive reading of the *PTMO* and a more detailed comparison with other passages of the *Cratylus* could potentially lead to new discussions on the relationship between language and perception, and the history, so to say, of linguistic conventionalism from the Sophists to Plato and beyond. For now,

46 See Mariapaola Bergomi, "Making Sense of δήλωμα (Plato's Cratylus' 423 b and Beyond)," *Akropolis, Journal for Hellenic Studies* 1 (2017).

I believe there is enough evidence to claim that Gorgias' anti-Eleatic arguments must be an indispensable part of this story.

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CHAPTER 9

Quelques Différences entre le *Cratyle* et le *Sophiste*

Frédérique Ildefonse

Abstract

In this contribution I seek to propose an approach to certain aspects of the *Cratylus* by combining two paths: an approach to the *Cratylus* by way of the *Sophist,* and an approach, enlightened by Stoicism, that considers what each one of the dialogues develops. I do not propose to consider what the *Cratylus* anticipates in the *Sophist* in terms of language study, but rather how the *Sophist* will shift the terms of the investigation of the name, specific to the *Cratylus*. By reading the *Cratylus* closely, one can better see what operations the Stranger carries out in the *Sophist*: on truth, on the relationship between *legein* and *logos*, on *logos* and its parts, as well as on the interlacing between the question of truth and the distinction between *legein* and *logos*, as well as on the interlacing between the question of truth and the relation between *logos* and its parts. I also propose to read some aspects of the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist* in light of Stoicism, which, for these dialogues as for others, sheds a particular light on the Platonic issues, but also allows us to understand the genesis of the Stoic concepts that arise, many of which emerge from a certain reading of Platonism.

Keywords

name – noun – verb – statement – *logos* – *onoma* – truth

Je voudrais pour cette contribution proposer une approche de certains aspects du *Cratyle* en conjuguant deux voies qui ne sont pas exclusives l'une de l'autre et qui peuvent, éventuellement, se recouper: une approche du *Cratyle* par le *Sophiste* et une approche, éclairée par le stoïcisme, de ce que l'un et l'autre des dialogues développent. Dans les deux cas, c'est d'une approche un peu particulière qu'il s'agit, parce que je propose un regard porté sur le *Cratyle* à partir d'une perspective qui, dans les deux cas, lui est postérieure, l'une intérieure à l'œuvre de Platon, l'autre extérieure. Il paraît certain, en effet, que le *Sophiste* est postérieur au *Cratyle*.

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Pour la première approche, du point de vue du *Sophiste* : je ne propose pas de considérer ce que le *Cratyle* anticiperait du *Sophiste* en termes d'étude sur le langage – ce qui pourrait pourtant certainement être fait. Je propose plutôt de considérer ce que le *Sophiste* va déplacer de l'enquête sur le nom, propre au *Cratyle* – où la considération du nom d'ailleurs n'apparaît pas découplée de celle du mot. Je propose aussi, pour certains de leurs aspects, de lire le *Cratyle* et le *Sophiste* à la lueur du stoïcisme. On pourrait proposer ce même angle de lecture pour d'autres dialogues platoniciens. Lire Platon à la lueur des concepts stoïciens permet de projeter une lumière particulière sur la problématique platonicienne mais permet aussi de comprendre la genèse des concepts stoïciens qui est issue, pour beaucoup, d'une certaine lecture du platonisme.[1]

Je commencerai par retraverser les premières étapes du dialogue. Le dialogue commence par rappeler, de la bouche d'Hermogène, la position de Cratyle: « d'après Cratyle, il existe une dénomination correcte naturellement adaptée à chacun des êtres : un nom n'est pas l'appellation dont sont convenus certains en lui assignant une parcelle de leur langue qu'ils émettent, mais il y a, par nature, une façon correcte de nommer les choses, la même pour tous, Grecs et Barbares ? » (383b).[2] On peut noter d'emblée comment la considération stoïcienne des *lekta*, qui intègre la différence des langues, se distingue de la position de Cratyle. Le nom par nature est pensé sur le modèle du nom propre: pour tous les hommes, « le nom par lequel nous appelons chacun est bien son nom » (383c).

Or en 384c – donc très vite dans le cours du dialogue – Socrate prend l'initiative de placer la discussion sur le terrain de la vérité : quand bien même Prodicos l'aurait instruit, lui, Socrate, par sa leçon à cinquante drachmes, alors qu'il n'a jusqu'alors entendu que la leçon à une drachme, « rien n'empêcherait Hermogène de savoir immédiatement la vérité sur la rectitude des noms » (οὐδὲν ἂν ἐκώλυέν σε αὐτίκα μάλα εἰδέναι τὴν ἀλήθειαν περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος) ; mais Socrate, lui, déclare qu'il ne sait pas « où peut bien se trouver la vérité en ce domaine » (οὔκουν οἶδα πῇ ποτε τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔχει περὶ τῶν τοιούτων). Lorsque Cratyle nie qu'Hermogène soit son vrai nom (ὅτι δὲ οὔ φησί σοι Ἑρμογένη

1 Sur ce point, voir tout particulièrement Jacques Brunschwig, « La théorie stoïcienne du genre suprême et l'ontologie platonicienne, » dans *Matter and Metaphysics, IVth Symposium Hellenisticum*, éd. Jonathan Barnes et Mario Mignucci (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1988) et Claude Imbert, *Pour une histoire de la logique. Un héritage platonicien* (Paris: PUF, 1999). Sur la lecture stoïcienne du *Cratyle*, on se reportera aussi à A. A. Long, « Stoic reactions to Plato's *Cratylus*, » dans *Le style de la pensée. Recueil de textes en hommage à Jacques Brunschwig*, éd. Monique Canto-Sperber et Pierre Pellegrin (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002).

2 Je cite la traduction de Catherine Dalimier pour GF-Flammarion.

ὄνομα εἶναι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ), il semble bien qu'il se moque de lui. Contre Cratyle, Hermogène, on le sait, défend une position conventionnaliste: « aucun être particulier ne porte aucun nom par nature, mais il le porte par effet de la loi, c'est-à-dire de la coutume de ceux qui ont coutume de donner les appellations » (οὐ γὰρ φύσει ἑκάστῳ πεφυκέναι ὄνομα οὐδὲν οὐδενί, ἀλλὰ νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει τῶν ἐθισάντων τε καὶ καλούντων) (384e). L'accent se porte sur « aucun être particulier » qui est la manière dont Catherine Dalimier a choisi de traduire ἑκάστῳ, chacun.

Reprenant ce terme nodal, Socrate entame la discussion par une définition du nom: que cette assignation provienne d'un particulier ou d'une cité, « l'appellation qu'on assigne à chaque chose est-elle son nom ? » (ὃ ἂν φῇς καλῇ τις ἕκαστον, τοῦθ' ἑκάστῳ ὄνομα ;). Jouant sur le sens même d'ἑκάστος, Socrate convoque le « singulier quelconque », si je reprends la formule de Giorgio Agamben[3] pour traduire ὁτιοῦν τῶν ὄντων, mais convoque ce singulier quelconque au profit d'un exemple intéressé, homme, même s'il est accompagné du cheval: « prenons un être quelconque, par exemple ce qu'on appelle *présentement* un "homme" ; si moi, je le dénomme "cheval", en dénommant "homme" ce qu'on nomme présentement "cheval", le même être aura comme nom public "homme", et comme nom privé, "cheval" ? Inversement, un autre aura comme nom privé "homme", et comme nom public "cheval" ? »

Quoi que cela signifie, je note que ces exemples sont ceux-là mêmes qu'Aristote donne comme exemples de substances ou d'essences – selon la manière qu'on choisit de traduire οὐσία – au début du traité des *Catégories* (οἷον ὃ νῦν καλοῦμεν ἄνθρωπον, ἐὰν ἐγὼ τοῦτο ἵππον προσαγορεύω), au chapitre 2 lorsqu'il élabore la quadripartition des étants qui précède et fonde sa définition de la substance/essence (1b5). Je noterai ici, dans la traduction française du passage du *Cratyle*, la présence de l'adverbe « présentement » qui est la manière dont Catherine Dalimier a astucieusement choisi de traduire νῦν. Traduire ainsi ne peut, pour un lecteur francophone, que faire penser à la traduction française du *Sophiste* dans la collection Budé où Diès traduisait « présentement » le νῦν de la fin du dialogue: « Théétète, avec qui présentement je dialogue, vole » (Θεαίτητος, ᾧ νῦν ἐγὼ διαλέγομαι, πέτεται) (263a8). Il est remarquable, si l'on a en tête la fin du *Sophiste*, de voir en outre comment la discussion se poursuit – et c'est un point qui m'a toujours intriguée dans le *Cratyle*. Socrate demande alors: « y a-t-il quelque chose que tu appelles "dire vrai" et quelque chose que tu appelles "dire faux" ? » (καλεῖς τι ἀληθῆ λέγειν καὶ ψευδῆ ;), et Hermogène

3 Giorgio Agamben, *La communauté qui vient. Théorie de la singularité quelconque* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

acquiesce. Socrate lui demande alors: « Il y aurait donc un énoncé vrai et un énoncé faux ? » (Οὐκοῦν εἴη ἂν λόγος ἀληθής, ὁ δὲ ψευδής ;) (385b1–2), et Hermogène acquiesce à nouveau. Socrate poursuit: « Par conséquent, celui qui dit les êtres comme ils sont dit vrai, celui qui les dit comme ils ne sont pas dit faux », d'où Socrate tire la proposition suivante: « mais alors il est possible de dire par un énoncé ce qui est et de dire ce qui n'est pas ».[4]

Une première remarque porte sur l'usage ici du terme λόγος : il est clair que le terme ne peut signifier dans ce passage du *Cratyle* ce qu'il signifie dans le *Sophiste*, car ici, derechef, il n'est question que de nom. Avoir en tête le *Sophiste* en lisant ce passage du *Cratyle* permet de démonter ce que nous avons peut-être trop bien intégré, c'est-à-dire la différence entre l'énoncé et le nom telle que le *Sophiste* l'a fondée, et de nous faire apercevoir combien, le plus souvent, nous présupposons une distinction qu'il revient à Platon d'avoir fondée dans le *Sophiste*. Une seconde remarque s'attache précisément à ce terme: ce λόγος ne fait que découler du précédent λέγειν. C'est parce qu'Hermogène a reconnu l'existence d'un *dire* vrai et d'un *dire* faux que du λέγειν découle le λόγος.

En 385c, la discussion en vient à mettre en jeu la considération de l'énoncé vrai et de ses parties[5] – on pense à la manière dont le Protagoras parle de la vertu et de ses parties, et se pose, à cet égard, la question du type de ses parties (les parties de la vertu doivent-elles se comprendre sur le modèle des parties du visage ou sur le modèle des parties de l'or qui « ne diffèrent les unes des autres et du tout qu'elles composent que par la grandeur et la petitesse » ?).[6] Dans le *Cratyle* la question du type de parties que sont les parties du nom ne sera pas posée. Peut-on y lire cependant, dans cette préoccupation des parties qu'il manifeste, la première occurrence de ce qui deviendra la préoccupation grammaticale du *mérismos*, c'est-à-dire l'analyse des différentes parties de l'énoncé, μέρη λόγου ?

En lisant le *Cratyle* de près, on voit mieux aussi ce qu'opère le *Sophiste* – quelles sont les opérations que réalise l'Étranger dans le *Sophiste* : sur la vérité, qui intervient si tôt dans le *Cratyle*, sur le rapport entre λέγειν et λόγος, sur le

4 Voir sur ce passage, et l'hypothèse selon laquelle la section 385b2-d1 (attestée à cet endroit dans tous les manuscrits) était à l'origine placée entre 387c5 et 387c6, la note 19 de la traduction de Catherine Dalimier qui renvoie à Richard Robinson, « A criticism of Plato's *Cratylus*, » *Philosophical Review* 65 (1956) (repris dans *Essays in Greek Philosophy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) et, à sa suite, Malcolm Schofield, « A displacement in the Text of the *Cratylus*, » *Classical Quaterly* 22 (1972). Voir également David Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–13 et Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato*: *A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 49 et suivantes.

5 Sur la question des parties de l'énoncé, voir Ademollo, *Commentary*, 54–55.

6 Platon, *Protagoras* 329d–e.

λόγος et ses parties, sur l'entrelacement entre la question de la vérité et la distinction entre λέγειν et λόγος, comme sur l'entrelacement entre la question de la vérité et le rapport entre le λόγος et ses parties. Il faut d'autant plus souligner cet entrelacement que ni la question du rapport entre λέγειν et λόγος, ni la question du rapport entre le λόγος et ses parties ne sont traitées indépendamment de la question de la vérité. Cette fois-ci c'est l'élaboration stoïcienne qui permet de voir cette dépendance, dans la mesure où la logique stoïcienne, elle, la lève, en élaborant le λεκτόν indépendamment de la question de sa vérité, mais, considérant sa construction, en le considérant soit comme λεκτόν incomplet, soit comme λεκτόν complet. Si cette dépendance se trouve dans les deux dialogues, le fait que la considération de l'énoncé y soit indissociable de la considération de la vérité n'est pourtant pas traité de la même manière dans le *Cratyle* et dans le *Sophiste*.

On doit souligner encore que l'examen des parties du λόγος distingue en outre – ce qui n'était pas le cas dans le *Protagoras* quand il était question des parties de la vertu – entre petites parties et grandes parties, ce qui permet à Socrate d'établir, moyennant l'accord d'Hermogène, qu'il n'y a pas de partie de l'énoncé plus petite que le nom: Ἔστιν οὖν ὅτι λέγεις λόγου σμικρότερον μόριον ἄλλο ἢ ὄνομα ; – Οὔκ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο σμικρότατον. Retenons encore ce point, car le *Sophiste* opère un déplacement à cet égard aussi: le plus petit n'y sera pas assigné au nom, mais au « premier énoncé » (πρῶτος λόγος) – dans l'intervalle entre les deux dialogues, le « plus petit » aura changé de situation pour passer du nom à l'énoncé et d'acception puisqu'il prendra dans le *Sophiste* une acception syntaxique.[7]

La suite du *Cratyle* est plus difficile pour des oreilles habituées au *Sophiste* : « Mais alors, le nom qui appartient à un énoncé vrai est, lui aussi, énoncé. » (Καὶ τοῦτο [ὄνομα] ἄρα τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λόγου λέγεται) (385c) – ce qu'énoncé vient ici traduire ce n'est pas λόγος, mais λέγεται. De même, appartenant à un énoncé vrai, il est vrai; appartenant à un énoncé faux, il est faux. « Il est donc possible », poursuit Socrate, « d'énoncer un nom faux comme il est possible d'énoncer un nom vrai, puisque c'est possible aussi pour un énoncé » (Ἔστιν ἄρα ὄνομα ψεῦδος καὶ ἀληθὲς λέγειν, εἴπερ καὶ λόγον). Sur ce point également, le *Sophiste* fera considérablement bouger les lignes, puisque la vérité y sera exclusivement la qualité de l'énoncé – le mot est choisi à dessein, puisque la distinction entre un énoncé vrai et un énoncé faux vient répondre, dans le *Sophiste,*

7 Sur le rapport entre le *Cratyle* et le *Sophiste*, voir Ademollo, *Commentary*, 59–61 et tout particulièrement 61.

à la question ποιόν (263b : Τούτων δὴ ποῖόν τινα ἑκάτερον φατέον εἶναι ;) –, et ne vaudra pas pour le nom.

Ces distinctions posées, Socrate en revient d'une manière qui nous apparaît plus serrée au débat sur la rectitude du nom: « dans ces conditions, ce que chacun dit être un nom pour quelque chose est-il un nom pour cette chose particulière ? » (Ὃ ἂν ἄρα ἕκαστος φῇ τῳ ὄνομα εἶναι, τοῦτό ἐστιν ἑκάστῳ ὄνομα) (385d). Il est difficile de trouver une traduction qui permette de rendre justice à la récurrence d'ἕκαστος – il faudrait l'entendre : « ce que *chacun* dit être un nom pour l'une quelconque des choses est-il un nom pour *chacune* de ces choses ? » La suite du passage voit Socrate confirmer et démultiplier cette distributivité d'ἕκαστος: « est-ce que tous les noms que l'on attribuera à chaque chose seront aussi ses noms et cela, à chaque fois qu'on les attribuera (Ἦ καὶ ὁπόσα ἂν φῇ τις ἑκάστῳ ὀνόματα εἶναι, τοσαῦτα ἔσται καὶ τότε ὁπόταν φῇ ;) ? ». « À chaque fois qu'on les attribuera » : est pris en compte le moment, ici le moment de l'attribution, là le moment de l'énonciation. L'actualité s'énonce comme la coïncidence entre l'acte de l'attribution et le moment de l'attribution.

À ce questionnement Hermogène répond de la manière la plus radicalement conventionnaliste: « je peux, moi, appeler chaque chose du nom que je lui ai imposé : tu peux, toi, l'appeler de tout autre nom que tu lui auras imposé. Il en est de même aussi pour les cites : je le vois, chacune nomme d'une façon particulière des choses identiques, les Grecs en se distinguant d'autres Grecs, et les Grecs en se distinguant des Barbares. » (385e).

C'est à ce point que Socrate propose de déplacer l'enquête du registre des noms au registre des êtres, ce qui, de manière irrésistible, déplace le terrain vers la relativité protagoréenne de l'homme-mesure : « Voyons, Hermogène, est-ce que les êtres aussi t'apparaissent ainsi: est-ce qu'ils ont une réalité particulière pour chaque individu (ἰδίᾳ αὐτῶν ἡ οὐσία εἶναι ἑκάστῳ) – comme le disait Protagoras, avec sa formule "l'homme est la mesure de toutes choses", prétendant que telles les choses m'apparaissent, telles elles sont pour moi, et que telles elles t'apparaissent, telles elles sont pour toi ? Ou bien les êtres te semblent-ils maintenir eux-mêmes une certaine stabilité de leur propre réalité (τινα βεβαιότητα τῆς οὐσίας) ? » (386a).

Le passage du registre des noms au registre des êtres peut certainement ici se discuter – mais on voit bien en tout cas en quoi il sert à Socrate dans la suite de la démultiplication de la distributivité qui préludait à l'identification du relativisme: c'est cette analogie relativiste qui justifie le changement de registre. Est introduit d'autre part, par opposition à ce relativisme, le thème d'une « certaine stabilité de l'essence », dont Socrate va se montrer le champion tout au long du dialogue. Le cœur du *Cratyle*, finalement non linguistique, réside certainement – et tout le passage étymologique du dialogue le confirme – dans

le choix à opérer entre un glissement permanent, héraclitéen, des êtres et l'affirmation d'une certaine stabilité de leur essence. On comprend mieux comme "homme" et "cheval" pourront réapparaître dans le traité des *Catégories* comme exemples d'οὐσία.

Il est remarquable que c'est la distinction entre homme méchant et homme bon, dont la teneur normative détermine durablement l'éthique et la psychologie grecques, qui intervient alors dans la discussion sur les noms. C'est en effet le caractère indubitable de cette distinction entre homme bon et homme méchant qui sert de matrice à l'opposition entre hommes raisonnables et hommes déraisonnables et en vient à mettre à mal la position relativiste de Protagoras. Le relativisme est mis à mal par le caractère normatif que contient la distinction indubitable entre homme méchant et homme bon –, et il faut en souligner les termes: « Si donc Protagoras disait vrai, si la vérité était que les choses sont telles qu'elles semblent à chacun, se pourrait-il que certains parmi nous soient raisonnables et d'autres pas ? » (… τοὺς μὲν ἡμῶν φρονίμους εἶναι, τοὺς δὲ ἄφρονας ;) Autrement formulé, en reprenant le substantif après l'adjectif employé : « … si la raison et la déraison existent (φρονήσεως οὔσης καὶ ἀφροσύνης), il n'est absolument pas possible que Protagoras dise vrai. Car en vérité, un tel ne saurait être plus raisonnable qu'un autre, en rien du tout, à supposer, bien sûr, que ce qui semble à chacun soit vrai pour chacun. » (… οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄν που τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ὁ ἕτερος τοῦ ἑτέρου φρονιμώτερος εἴη, εἴπερ ἃ ἂν ἑκάστῳ δοκῇ ἑκάστῳ ἀληθῆ ἔσται) (386c–d).

Cette attitude revient aussi à laisser de côté la position d'Euthydème, selon lequel « tout est similaire pour tout le monde en même temps et toujours » (δοκεῖ πᾶσι πάντα ὁμοίως εἶναι ἅμα καὶ ἀεί), où toutes les caractéristiques présentes correspondent par opposition à ce que j'ai appelé plus tôt la démultiplication de la distributivité. Or rejeter tant la position de Protagoras que celle d'Euthydème conduit à la thèse de la stabilité précédemment évoquée : « s'il n'est pas vrai que tout soit similaire pour tout le monde en même temps et toujours, s'il n'est pas vrai non plus que chacun des êtres existe d'une façon particulière pour chacun, il est évident que les choses ont elles-mêmes une certaine réalité stable qui leur appartient et qui n'est pas relative à nous, qu'elles ne sont pas dépendantes de nous, entraînées çà et là par notre imagination: elles ont par elles-mêmes un rapport à leur propre réalité conformément à leur nature » (Οὐκοῦν εἰ μήτε πᾶσι πάντα ἐστὶν ὁμοίως ἅμα καὶ ἀεί, μήτε ἑκάστῳ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστον [τῶν ὄντων ἐστίν], δῆλον δὴ ὅτι αὐτὰ αὑτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιόν ἐστι τὰ πράγματα, οὐ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὐδὲ ὑφ'ἡμῶν ἑλκόμενα ἄνω καὶ κάτω τῷ ἡμετέρῳ φαντάσματι, ἀλλὰ καθ'αὑτὰ πρὸς τὴν αὑτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντα ᾗπερ πέφυκεν) (386d–e).

La stabilité relative résulte pour ainsi dire du démenti que la distinction normative entre homme bon et homme mauvais a apporté au relativisme et

qu'elle a donc vaincu. Je pense qu'il y a ici plus qu'un « lieu commun », comme l'écrit Victor Goldschmidt dans son essai sur le *Cratyle*[8] et nous trouvons ici la mention de l'εὐπραξία qui permettra à Socrate, « une fois acquise la stabilité des choses en général, (de réclamer) la même fixité pour l'acte de parler et de nommer ».[9]

Suivant une continuité que le *Sophiste* ne démentira pas et qui est fondée dans la langue, ce premier point marqué – la reconnaissance pour les choses (πράγματα) d'une stabilité qui n'est pas relative à nous – s'énonce dans des termes qu'Aristote pourrait reprendre à son compte: « un rapport à leur propre réalité conformément à leur nature »[10] et se poursuit par une considération de l'action (πράξεις) : « les choses sont-elles donc elles-mêmes ainsi par nature, tandis qu'il n'en va pas de même pour les actions auxquelles elles ressortissent ? Ou bien les actions ne sont-elles pas elles aussi une certaine espèce d'êtres ? » (Πότερον οὖν αὐτὰ μὲν ἂν εἴη οὕτω πεφυκότα, αἱ δὲ πράξεις αὐτῶν οὐ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ; ἢ οὐ καὶ αὗται ἕν τι εἶδος τῶν ὄντων εἰσίν, αἱ πράξεις ;)[11]

Pour ce qui concerne l'introduction de la considération de l'action, le rapport au *Sophiste* est également probant, puisque c'est la considération de l'action et corrélativement de l'actant qui sert de matrice à la distinction entre nom et verbe telle que l'Étranger la définit dans le *Sophiste*.

Considérons un instant la « leçon de grammaire » du *Sophiste*, pour reprendre une expression de Claude Imbert.[12] Noms et verbes y sont présentés comme des δηλώματα, comme les deux variétés τῶν τῇ φωνῇ περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν δηλωμάτων (261d5), les deux variétés des manières de désigner par la voix ce qui est, ou plutôt de mettre en évidence ce qui est ou de renvoyer, par la voix, à ce qui est. Ce double genre est précisé de la manière suivante: Τὸ μὲν ἐπὶ ταῖς πράξεσιν ὂν δήλωμα ῥῆμά που λέγομεν (262a3–4), nous appelons verbe celle des manières de mettre en évidence qui renvoie aux actions. Τὸ δέ γ'ἐπ'αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἐκείνας πράττουσι σημεῖον τῆς φωνῆς ἐπιτεθὲν ὄνομα (262a6–7), on a donné le nom de nom au signe vocal qui renvoie aux agents des actions, littéralement

8 Victor Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le* Cratyle. *Contribution à l'histoire de la pensée de Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 1982), 54.

9 Goldschmidt, *Essai*, 56.

10 Goldschmidt, *Essai*, 58 (note 2), le dit lui aussi en citant Dupréel : « M. Dupréel compare la théorie de l'εἶδος et de l'οὐσία du *Cratyle* avec la *Métaphysique* d'Aristote […] et arrive à ce résultat : "Le *Cratyle* nous paraît donc être, en partie du moins, une exploitation littéraire d'un écrit dont la *Métaphysique* est sans doute un développement philosophique. [p. 241]" ».

11 Sur ce point, voir également Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 57.

12 Voir notamment Claude Imbert, *Pour une histoire de la logique. Un héritage platonicien* (Paris : PUF, 1999), 6–7 et 11–21.

à ceux-là mêmes qui agissent les actions. Le même terme, δήλωμα, figure dans le *Cratyle* à propos du nom: ainsi lorsqu'à Cratyle qui vient de déclarer que « cela ne lui plaît pas d'affirmer qu'un nom existe, mais qu'il n'est pas bien établi », Socrate pose la question suivante: « cela ne te plaît pas que le nom soit un moyen de faire voir la chose » (δήλωμα τοῦ πράγματος) ? (433d).

Il est important de noter que, dans le *Sophiste*, l'Étranger commence par le δήλωμα qui renvoie aux actions, et qu'il passe ensuite aux agents ou actants: on commence par le verbe. Les stoïciens sauront le retenir, lorsqu'ils centreront leur logique sur le prédicat qui est le signifié du verbe. Dans le *Sophiste*, les verbes signifient des actions. Mais signifier des actions, énoncer des verbes mis bout à bout (comme βαδίζει, il marche, τρέχει, il court, καθεύδει, il dort) ne produit aucun énoncé. De même pour les noms: lorsqu'il énonce des noms mis bout à bout (comme λέων, lion, ἔλαφος, cerf, ἵππος, cheval), par une telle continuité, personne (οὐδείς) ne constitue encore aucun énoncé, *καὶ κατὰ ταύτην δὴ τὴν συνέχειαν οὐδείς πω συνέστη λόγος* .[13] Les noms en revanche *nomment* ceux qui agissent, ceux qui font les actions. Même si les noms constituent l'autre genre de δήλωμα, ils sont caractérisés par le fait de nommer, et non pas seulement par le fait de désigner, de mettre en évidence, ou de renvoyer, δηλοῦν, qu'ils ont en partage avec les verbes, ou de σημαίνειν. Mais l'enjeu du *Sophiste*, c'est, à partir de ces deux composants hétérogènes qu'unit leur fonction de δήλωμα quand bien même ils l'assument différemment, de constituer ou de ne pas constituer un λόγος. Indéniablement, ce passage du *Sophiste* est capital pour l'histoire du *merismos*, c'est-à-dire pour l'analyse grammaticale qui distingue les différentes parties de l'énoncé (μέρη τοῦ λόγου). Bien certainement, l'Étranger n'entend pas ici dresser une liste exhaustive des parties de l'énoncé, mais il donne les deux parties sans lesquelles il ne pourrait y avoir énoncé. Un point est remarquable: alors que le *Cratyle* parle des parties du λόγος et entend raisonner sur l'énoncé comme il raisonne sur ses parties, le *Sophiste* qui, objectivement, décrit et définit deux parties de l'énoncé sans lesquelles il n'y a pas énoncé, ne prononce jamais le mot partie pour l'une ou l'autre, pour le nom ou pour le verbe.

Le *Sophiste* commence par le verbe et définit le nom dans son rapport au verbe. Mais il relègue aussi le nom à la nomination, en opposant le fait de nommer au fait de « réaliser quelque chose »[14] : οὐκ ὀνομάζει μόνον ἀλλά τι

13 Platon, *Soph.* 262c1–2.

14 Sur ce passage, voir également Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 59 et 162–164. Mais je n'interprète pas la séquence οὐκ ὀνομάζει μόνον dans le sens d'une antécédence du nom sur le verbe, de la nomination sur l'énoncé.

περαίνει, συμπλέκων τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς ὀνόμασι. En assemblant les verbes aux noms, quelqu'un *ne nomme pas seulement*, mais réalise quelque chose.

Cette réalisation suppose l'entrelacement du verbe au nom. « Ne nomme pas seulement » : voici l'opération que le *Cratyle* ne dégageait pas, en restant pris dans l'orbe du nom-mot. Mais il y a plusieurs manières d'entendre « ne nomme pas seulement ». Lorsque quelqu'un mélange en effet nom et verbe, faut-il comprendre qu'il nomme, mais ne nomme pas seulement ? De fait il nomme en effet, parce qu'il emploie un nom. Ou bien faut-il comprendre que même s'il emploie un nom, d'emblée il opère autre chose qu'une nomination – qu'il ne s'en tient pas au fait de nommer ?

Il importe de souligner l'importance du passage du dialogue où il est question de τύπος, de « marque »,[15] si l'on reprend la manière dont Catherine Dalimier traduit ce terme. Cratyle souligne un point, relatif à l'art grammatical, τῇ γραμματικῇ τέχνῃ : « lorsque, selon l'art grammatical, nous attribuons ces lettres (le *a*, le *b*, et chacun des éléments) aux noms, en cas d'omission, d'addition, de changement, il n'est pas vrai que nous ayons là le nom écrit, encore qu'incorrectement écrit : il n'est même pas écrit, mais il est autre dès qu'il subit un quelconque de ces accidents » (τὸ παράπαν οὐδὲ γέγραπται, ἀλλ'εὐθὺς ἕτερόν ἐστιν ἐάν τι τούτων πάθῃ) (432a). À cette remarque, Socrate vient objecter qu'il « craint que ce ne soit pas [là] une bonne façon de mener notre examen » (Μὴ γὰρ οὐ καλῶς σκοπῶμεν οὕτω σκοποῦντες, ὦ Κρατύλε).

Ce qui est particulièrement intéressant, c'est la manière dont Socrate propose alors de déplacer la manière d'enquêter, par rapport à cette sorte de bijection – de type grammatical – entre les lettres et les noms-mots, ὀνόματα. Ce qui est également intéressant alors, c'est la manière dont, ici, dans le *Cratyle*, Socrate envisage la référence à la γραμματικὴ τέχνη d'une manière bien différente de celle qu'il pratique dans ceux qu'on appelle les dialogues scientifiques, le *Théétète*, le *Sophiste*, le *Philèbe* : dans ces dialogues en effet, la dialectique se caractérise comme une γραμματικὴ τέχνη supérieure, ou déplacée.[16] Il importe de souligner ce qu'opère l'adverbe εὐθὺς : il n'y a pas de possible reconnaissance d'un nom lorsqu'il est incorrectement écrit ; *tout de suite*, on passe à autre chose; *tout de suite*, *aussitôt* il devient autre. C'est ce phénomène, qu'on peut appeler un « saut », que je voudrais souligner ici dans la suite du *Cratyle*, et dont je voudrais voir la modification dans le *Sophiste*. Dès qu'on mélange les verbes aux noms, *tout de suite*, *aussitôt*, on les assemble et le premier entrelacement est devenu énoncé, si j'ose dire, des énoncés, le premier et le plus petit

15 Sur cet aspect, voir Ademollo, *Commentary*, 371–373 et Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 137–138.

16 See Frédérique Ildefonse, *La naissance de la grammaire dans l'Antiquité grecque* (Paris: Vrin, 1997), 63–70.

(τότε δ᾽ἥρμοσέν τε καὶ λόγος ἐγένετο εὐθὺς ἡ πρώτη συμπλοκή, σχεδὸν τῶν λόγων ὁ πρῶτός τε καὶ σμικρότατος) (*Soph.* 262c6). L'aoriste est ici un aoriste d'instantanéité.[17] Dans le *Cratyle*, en 385c, Socrate distinguait, dans l'énoncé vrai, l'énoncé vrai dans son entier, et ses parties, dont il interrogeait le rapport à la vérité ; de ces parties, il distinguait entre les grandes et les petites parties – ce que je n'ai pas lu ailleurs – et concluait: « quoi que ce soit que tu dises, est-il une partie d'énoncé plus petite que le nom ? » À quoi Hermogène répondait que non, que le nom était la plus petite. Ici, le *Sophiste* reconfigure le minimal: le minimal pertinent n'est pas le nom; le minimal pertinent, c'est l'énoncé. Et, sans jamais parler de parties, l'Étranger élabore le premier *mérismos* grammatical.

Reprenons la manière dont Socrate demande à Cratyle de modifier l'enquête : il lui demande d'instaurer de la distance par rapport à cette sorte de bijection – de type grammatical – entre les lettres et les noms/mots, ὀνόματα. Socrate oppose alors « ce dont l'existence ou la non-existence dépend d'un certain nombre » (Ἴσως ὅσα ἔκ τινος ἀριθμοῦ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι πάσχοι ἂν τοῦτο ὃ σὺ λέγεις) (432a) – alors l'enquête de type grammatical, dans les termes du *Cratyle*, vaut – à un autre type de rectitude qui vaut cette fois « pour une certaine qualité et une image considérée dans son ensemble » (τοῦ δὲ ποιοῦ τινος καὶ συμπάσης εἰκόνος) (432b). Dans le premier cas, retirer ou ajouter quelque chose fait qu'un nombre devient autre tout de suite, ou aussitôt (ἕτερος εὐθὺς γέγονε). Dans le second cas, « au contraire, il n'est même absolument pas besoin de reproduire totalement ce qu'on représente, si l'on veut que ce soit une image » (ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐναντίον οὐδὲ τὸ παράπαν δέῃ πάντα ἀποδοῦναι οἷόν ἐστιν ᾧ εἰκάζει, εἰ μέλλει εἰκὼν εἶναι) (432b).

Une autre rectitude est donc en jeu, selon laquelle l'image ne cesse pas d'être image si l'on ajoute ou enlève quelque chose. Ce point rejoint plus haut dans le dialogue le passage en 393d qui établit que: « si un rejeton naît d'un roi il faut l'appeler "roi". En revanche, qu'on signifie la même chose par telles ou telles syllabes, peu importe. Et qu'on ajoute ou retranche une lettre, cela n'a pas non plus d'importance, pourvu que règne dans le nom la réalité de la chose qu'il met en évidence » (οὐδ᾽εἰ πρόσκειταί τι γράμμα ἢ ἀφῄρηται, οὐδὲν οὐδὲ τοῦτο, ἕως ἂν ἐγκρατὴς ᾖ ἡ οὐσία τοῦ πράγματος δηλουμένη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι). Il apparaît clairement que le τύπος (432e)[18] conceptualise ici l'ἐγκρατὴς οὐσία τοῦ πράγματος. Corrélativement (394a) : « il est permis d'opérer des variations avec les syllabes au point de faire croire à l'homme ordinaire que les noms diffèrent bien qu'ils

17 Je remercie Jean Lallot d'avoir attiré mon attention sur cette valeur ici de l'aoriste.

18 Sur le τύπος, voir également *Lois* VII, note 54 traduction GF-Flammarion et *Lois* X, note 107; voir également Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 138 et Ademollo, *Commentary*, 371–373.

soient identiques. » Plutôt qu' « homme ordinaire », je préférerais comprendre pour τῷ ἰδιωτικῶς ἔχοντι l'amateur ou le non spécialiste.

Au moment où il reprend cette question de l'image, Socrate avance une autre formulation sur laquelle je voudrais attirer l'attention : « ne sens-tu pas que les images sont bien loin de contenir les mêmes choses que ce dont elles sont images ? » (ἢ οὐκ αἰσθάνῃ ὅσου ἐνδέουσιν αἱ εἰκόνες τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχειν ἐκείνοις ὧν εἰκόνες εἰσίν ;) (432d). Dans cette formulation, il y va de ce que j'appellerai le « symbolique », et en tout cas d'un écart, délibéré, par rapport à ce qu'engage l'imitation.

On se trouve alors dans une logique de la suffisance, d'une suffisance qu'incarne ce que Socrate appelle la « marque », τύπος, quand la reproduction totale mènerait au contraire à la reduplication : « n'aurait-on pas comme cela deux choses (un Cratyle et une image de Cratyle) si un dieu venait à représenter non seulement ta couleur et ta figure, comme (le font) les portraitistes, alors que s'il ajoutait tout ce qui est à l'intérieur de toi, tel quel, restituait à l'identique la douceur et la chaleur, y plaçait le mouvement, l'âme, la réflexion telles qu'elles sont en toi – en un mot, s'il présentait à côté de toi d'autres qualités similaires à toutes celles que tu as, aurait-on dans ce cas Cratyle et une image de Cratyle, ou deux Cratyle ? » (432c)[19] Ce risque de la réduplication n'est pas étranger au mobilisme universel que la relative stabilité de l'οὐσία va permettre de parer et il n'est pas seulement celui d'une identité qui pullulerait, d'une réduplication de l'identique : « quelles drôles de choses les noms feraient-ils subir à ce dont ils sont les noms s'ils leur étaient totalement et en tout point assimilés ! Tout serait en quelque sorte dédoublé, sans qu'on puisse dire pour aucun lequel est la chose même, lequel est le nom. » (432d).

Ici se dit la nécessité d'un défaut qui n'accuse pas seulement la différence ontologique – ce dont on a l'habitude en terre platonicienne –, mais qui est la condition du maintien de la distinction, de la différence entre la chose et le nom (τὸ μὲν αὐτό, τὸ δὲ ὄνομα).

Je voudrais considérer à nouveau la seconde formulation que propose Socrate pour l'autre type de rectitude, celle de l'image : « ne sens-tu pas que les images sont bien loin de contenir les mêmes choses que ce dont elles sont images ? » (ἢ οὐκ αἰσθάνῃ ὅσου ἐνδέουσιν αἱ εἰκόνες τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχειν ἐκείνοις ὧν εἰκόνες εἰσίν ;) Il importe en effet de souligner ce défaut qu'exprime le verbe ἐνδέουσιν – on pourrait penser à traduire ὅσου ἐνδέουσιν αἱ εἰκόνες τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχειν ἐκείνοις ὧν εἰκόνες εἰσίν : « à quel point il s'en faut que les images possèdent les

19 Sur ce passage des deux Cratyle, voir Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus, 46, note 44 et 137–138 et Ademollo, *Commentary*, 363–365, notamment 365, note 99.

mêmes [caractéristiques] que ce dont elles sont les images ». « How much they fall short of being identical? » comme le propose le LSJ qui donne cet exemple du *Cratyle* pour le verbe ἐνδέω. Ce manque dans l'image rappelle le manque en perfection par rapport auquel Socrate dans le *Phédon* définit la réminiscence, mais il se trouve ici bien différemment affecté. Le défaut ici nous prémunit, en l'occurrence, il nous prémunit de la réduplication. À aucun moment la théorie de l'image telle que la soutient l'Étranger dans le *Sophiste* ne reprend cette analyse, pourtant géniale, du *Cratyle*.

On se rappelle la caractéristique suivante du système stoïcien : on ne pourrait pas en changer une lettre sans que l'ensemble ne s'en trouve modifié. « Caton, dans Cicéron, insiste sur "l'agencement admirable de leur doctrine" ; on ne peut rien trouver, dit-il, qui soit "aussi bien agencé, aussi solidement lié, aussi étroitement assemblé" ; toutes les parties s'y enchaînent de telle sorte que "le déplacement d'une lettre quelconque suffirait à tout faire crouler". Or cette structure si serrée qu'elle se désagrège au moindre accroc, c'est précisément l'essentiel de ce que nous entendons par l'expression de modèle conjonctif ».[20] Ici le *Cratyle* propose le modèle exactement inverse et définit ce qu'il appelle « une autre rectitude » et que je propose d'appeler « symbolique » : « Vois-tu bien, mon cher, que s'agissant d'une image [et des choses dont nous parlions tout à l'heure], c'est une autre rectitude qu'il faut chercher et qu'il ne faut pas vouloir de force que l'image ne soit plus image si l'on enlève ou si l'on ajoute quelque chose ? Ou encore: ne sens-tu pas que les images sont bien loin de contenir les mêmes choses que ce dont elles sont image. » (432d). Plus loin (432e), toujours de la bouche de Socrate: « Admets que le nom lui aussi est tantôt bien, tantôt mal établi ; ne le force pas à avoir toutes ses lettres pour être parfaitement tel que ce dont il est le nom. Admets même qu'on peut ajouter une lettre qui n'est pas appropriée (ἀλλ'ἔα καὶ τὸ μὴ προσῆκον γράμμα ἐπιφέρειν). Et si tu l'admets pour une lettre, admets-le pour un nom dans l'énoncé ; et si tu l'admets pour un nom, admets aussi qu'un énoncé peut s'ajouter dans le discours, sans être approprié aux choses, et que la chose n'en est pas moins nommée et dite, tant que le discours porte la marque de la chose dont il traite (εἰ δὲ γράμμα, καὶ ὄνομα ἐν λόγῳ· εἰ δὲ ὄνομα, καὶ λόγον ἐν λόγῳ μὴ προσήκοντα τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπιφέρεσθαι, καὶ μηδὲν ἧττον ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ λέγεσθαι, ἕως ἂν ὁ τύπος ἐνῇ τοῦ πράγματος περὶ οὗ ἂν ὁ λόγος ᾖ). » Socrate alors rapproche cette situation de son échange avec Hermogène, plus tôt dans le dialogue, à propos du nom des lettres: on ne dit toutes seules que quatre lettres, en l'occurrence E, Υ, O, Ω

20 Cicéron, *De finibus* III 74, cité dans Jacques Brunschwig, « Le modèle conjonctif, » dans *Études sur les philosophies hellénistiques. Épicurisme, stoïcisme, scepticisme* (Paris: PUF, 1995), 162.

(qu'on n'appellera *è psilon*, *u psilon*, *o mikron* et *o mega* qu'à partir de l'époque byzantine), pour les autres « nous créons des noms en ajoutant d'autres lettres. Mais tant que nous y mettons la valeur manifestée de la lettre, il est correct de donner à cette lettre le nom qui nous la mettra en évidence » (ἀλλ'ἕως ἂν αὐτοῦ δηλουμένην τὴν δύναμιν ἐντιθῶμεν, ὀρθῶς ἔχει ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὄνομα καλεῖν ὃ αὐτὸ ἡμῖν δηλώσει) (393e). Ainsi pour bêta : « l'addition du e, du t et du a ne gêne » en rien – « on n'en manifeste pas moins la nature de cette lettre au moyen du nom entier comme le voulait le législateur » (οἷον τὸ "βῆτα"· ὁρᾷς ὅτι τοῦ ἦτα καὶ τοῦ ταῦ καὶ τοῦ ἄλφα προστεθέντων οὐδὲν ἐλύπησεν, ὥστε μὴ οὐχὶ τὴν ἐκείνου τοῦ στοιχείου φύσιν δηλῶσαι ὅλῳ τῷ ὀνόματι οὗ ἐβούλετο ὁ νομοθέτης) (393e).

Dans le passage en 432d–e, comme dans le précédent en 393e, la rectitude ne touche pas à l'intégralité des lettres présentes, et Socrate file le raisonnement d'une exhaustivité non nécessaire de la lettre au nom, du nom à l'énoncé et de l'énoncé au discours: « tant que cette marque est là, et même si les traits appropriés n'y sont pas tous, l'objet sera dit » (ὅταν γὰρ τοῦτο ἐνῇ, κἂν μὴ πάντα τὰ προσήκοντα ἔχῃ, λέξεταί γε τὸ πρᾶγμα) (433a).

Même si cette différence ne paraît pas, au premier abord, toucher à la philosophie du langage ou à l'analyse du langage telles que le *Cratyle* ou le *Sophiste* les développent, il me semble important de noter cette différence de traitement de l'image, traitement de l'image qui, dans les deux cas, est lié aux analyses de philosophie du langage.

Le *Théétète* de Platon s'achève (206c–210d) sur la distinction de trois acceptions de λόγος : « La première serait: rendre apparente sa propre pensée au moyen de la voix, avec des expressions et des mots, en figurant son opinion dans le flux qui passe à travers la bouche comme en un miroir ou dans de l'eau » (206d) ; « la seconde », c'est « le chemin conduisant, élément par élément, jusqu'au tout » (208c) ; « la troisième », c'est « avoir un signe à mentionner par lequel l'objet en question diffère de tout le reste » (trad. M. Narcy). On notera que cette troisième définition de λόγος semble pouvoir être mise en rapport inverse de la théorie de l'image proposée dans le *Cratyle* et qui ne paraît pas avoir été beaucoup reprise.

J'achèverai par deux remarques. La première rejoint la question de la totalité. Relire le *Cratyle*, c'était aussi relire le passage fascinant qui paraît, du sein de la problématique du nom propre au *Cratyle*, s'élancer vers la dialectique: « [...] les peintres qui veulent obtenir une ressemblance ne posent parfois que du pourpre, mais posent parfois quelque autre teinte, et parfois encore, en mélangent plusieurs (par exemple lorsqu'ils préparent un portrait humain ou autre chose de ce genre); d'après moi, ils le font pour autant que chaque image semble réclamer chaque teinte; c'est ainsi que nous aussi nous imposons les éléments sur les choses, un seul élément sur une seule chose,

là où cela nous semble nécessaire, ou plusieurs éléments ensemble, créant ce qu'on appelle des syllabes; puis nous assemblons encore des syllabes dont sont composés les noms et les locutions prédicatives ; puis, à nouveau, avec les noms et les locutions prédicatives, nous assemblerons quelque chose de grand, de beau, de total, comme tout à l'heure le portrait avec la peinture. C'est alors que, par l'effet de l'art onomastique ou rhétorique (quel que soit le nom qu'on lui donne), nous constituerons le discours. Mais non, ce n'est pas nous qui le constituerons, comme je me suis laissé aller à le dire: ce sont les Anciens qui ont accompli cette composition telle qu'elle est. » (424e–425b). Il y a dans l'expression, dans la parole une sorte d'élan, de visée vers quelque chose de total – qu'on cherche, ou non, à relier cette aspiration avec le naturalisme platonicien, qui agrège langage et *cosmos* dans l'énoncé et que le stoïcisme viendra radicaliser.[21] De cette aspiration à la totalité, on voit combien la dialectique est le soutien. Mais – et ce sera ma seconde remarque –, de cette aspiration à la totalité, on voit dans le *Cratyle* qu'elle se développe par accroissements successifs. De fait, la différence entre ὄνομα et ῥῆμα n'est pas la même dans le *Cratyle* que dans le *Sophiste*, et demeure, dans le *Cratyle*, sous-tendue par cette dynamique d'accroissement qui culmine dans la retranscription de la totalité, ou, du moins, dans sa visée. Une des caractéristiques du *Cratyle* consiste dans cet accroissement du simple au complexe, à partir de ce très petit – de ce plus petit – qu'est le nom. Nom-mot, assemblage de mots, formule complexe, enchaînement. On a vu tout à l'heure comment le raisonnement sur l'image se faisait de la lettre au nom, du nom à l'énoncé, et de l'énoncé au discours (432e). On sait combien grammaire et musique ont été utilisées par Platon comme les paradigmes de l'activité dialectique. De ce point témoignent des passages du *Sophiste*, du *Philèbe*, du *Théétète*. Hors du *Cratyle* de Platon, j'aimerais renvoyer à un petit passage d'un article de Jean Lallot consacré à « Analogie et pathologie dans la grammaire alexandrine », dans le précieux recueil *Études sur la grammaire alexandrine*: « La grammaire traite de l'énoncé (λόγος), dont elle décrit les constituants ('parties du discours', μέρη λόγου), eux-mêmes analysés en leurs parties intégrantes (syllabes, phonèmes-lettres) ».[22] À cet égard l'approche du *Cratyle* paraît plus grammaticale, au sens ancien, que celle du *Sophiste* quand bien même le *Sophiste* est pour nous le plus proche de la grammaire scolaire que nous avons pratiquée et que nous pratiquons encore, celle qui correspond à l'analyse grammaticale. En effet, si le *Sophiste* conserve

21 Voir aussi *Phèdre* 264c: « tout discours doit être constitué à la façon d'un être vivant, qui possède un corps à qui il ne manque ni tête ni pieds, mais qui a un milieu et des extrémités, écrits de façon à convenir entre eux et à l'ensemble » (trad. L. Brisson).

22 Jean Lallot, *Études sur la grammaire alexandrine* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 23.

le rapport aux lettres comme paradigme de la grammaire, s'il établit le premier *merismos* en distinguant les deux parties fondamentales du nom et du verbe nécessaires à l'énoncé minimal et premier, il ne parle plus comme le fait encore le *Cratyle* de partage syllabique. En ce sens, le *Cratyle* est plus proche de la grammaire telle qu'elle sera pratiquée dans la grammaire alexandrine.

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CHAPTER 10

A Theory of Language between the *Cratylus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*

Filip Karfík

Abstract

On the surface, the *Cratylus* presents us with two competing theories concerning the "correctness of names", a naturalist and a conventionalist one. More in depth, it attacks the very idea that the study of language is the privileged or even the only way of acquiring knowledge. Besides casting doubt upon the epistemological value of words it raises the question of the ontology allowing for a theory of knowledge. In comparison with the *Cratylus*, the theory of language put forward in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* marks a double shift: from *onoma* to *logos* and from the relation *onoma–pragma* to the relation *logos–dianoia–eide*. The alternative between an ontology of flux and an ontology of unchanging Forms which underlies the debate about the correctness of names in the *Cratylus* resurfaces in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. The *Sophist* tries to resolve this conflict by assigning motion and rest their proper places among the greatest genera, thus replacing the primitive ontology of single Forms with a structured ontology of relationships among them. This ontology provides a basis for the theory of falsehood of judgement and speech and, more generally, for the theory of imitation which can be true or false. On this new basis, the conception of speech as a kind of *mimesis* can be reformulated. Since speaking and judging consist in a kind of imitation and since imitation, as such, allows for falsehood, neither speech nor judgement can be the criterion of truth. Only what is not itself an imitation can provide this criterion.

Keywords

Plato – *Cratylus* (Plato) – *Theaetetus* (Plato) – *Sophist* (Plato) – language – ontology

On the surface, the *Cratylus* is about two competing theories concerning the "correctness of names" (*orthotes onomaton*), a naturalist and a conventionalist one. For the most of the dialogue, the reader has the impression that the

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objective of Socrates' debate with Hermogenes and Cratylus – the conventionalist and the naturalist respectively – is to weigh the pros and cons of each of these two theories in order to reach a somewhat intermediary position by taking both of them into account. Thus, in his discussion with Hermogenes, Socrates reinforces naturalist claims whereas, in discussing with Cratylus, he points out that conventionalism cannot be altogether abandoned. He is seemingly heading towards a basically naturalist theory (names imitate the things as they are in themselves) with a conventionalist ingredient added in (for some linguistic phenomena there is no other explanation than usage, i.e. convention).

Nevertheless, the outcome of the discussion as a whole is a different one. Socrates ends up disapproving of Cratylus' take on the correctness of names, and more particularly of his claim that names provide knowledge of things. We cannot rely on names, Socrates concludes, if we are searching for knowledge of things. As a matter of fact, the analysis of compound names into primitive ones, and of the latter into their elements, eventually demonstrates that, without an extra-linguistic criterion of truth, we cannot decide which names have been formed correctly, i.e. so as to imitate the things they refer to, and which have not. This outcome does not dismiss the naturalist principle as such – it still may be the case that names somehow imitate the nature of what they refer to – but it undermines the epistemological claim that we can draw on names in order to acquire knowledge of the nature of things. On the contrary, to establish whether names are correct or not, we have to know the things "from themselves rather than from their names" (439b7–8).[1] To put it in more general terms, parts of speech as such, no less than their elements and compounds, are not the place to learn the truth, either about names or about the things they denote. It thus turns out that the dialogue as a whole does not aim at finding a middle way between the two competing theories, but, much more radically, at attacking the very idea (not unfamiliar to modern readers) that the study of language is the privileged or even the only way of acquiring knowledge. What is at stake is the epistemological value of words.

Despite the fact that Cratylus still declares himself unshaken in his stance, the last section of the dialogue (437a–440e) casts a long shadow on the series of etymologies (393a–427d) that Socrates had previously provided in order to substantiate the naturalist theory, much to Cratylus' satisfaction (428c). This does not come totally as a surprise. There were warning signs from the very

1 Trans. after Francesco Ademollo, *The* Cratylus *of Plato. A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 447.

beginning of Socrates' astonishing performance, most notably his tracing the inspiration that befell him back to his having listened to Euthyphro earlier that day, as well as his declaring that, tomorrow, he and his interlocutors will need to purify themselves from it (396d–e). The important thing about these etymologies is that, on the whole and particularly up to the turning point in 437a, they fit a conception of reality as being in motion and of things as fundamentally differentiating themselves from each other in the way they move. While this point may not be obvious from the start, it gradually becomes plain until it is expressed most fully in the etymology of the words for "truth" (*aletheia*) and "being" (*on*, *ousia*) in terms of motion – "truth" signifying "divine roaming" (*aletheia* = *theia ale*) and "being" meaning "going" (*on* = *ion*, 421b-c) – and generalised in the following statement: "We say that names signify for us being on the assumption that everything moves and is carried about and flows" (436e2–4).[2] The turning point consists in the analysis of words for "knowledge" (*episteme*), "certain" (*bebaion*), "enquiry" (*historia*), "convincing" (*piston*) and "memory" (*mneme*) in terms of rest (*stasis*), instead of motion (*kinesis*), with the general conclusion that, in such examples, names signify things at rest (*menonta ta pragmata*, 437c6–8). The two alternatives, one based on the assumption that things are in motion, the other on the assumption that they are at rest, create a dilemma, which leads to Socrates' above-mentioned conclusion, according to which knowledge of the nature of things cannot be acquired from their names. More precisely, and more detrimentally to the naturalist concept of the correctness of names, the two accounts show that those who first established the names may have done so based on a false assumption, so that the names that we analyse deceive us (439c). As a matter of fact, the assumption of a general flux of things, which seems to underlie the signification of words previously analysed by Socrates, does not allow for the possibility of knowledge (*gnosis*) since the latter requires stability (439d–440e). Should knowledge exist, affirms Socrates, there must be rest on the side of the act of knowing, as well as on the side of the object known. This is why Socrates prefers to maintain that the things themselves – the beautiful itself, the good itself, etc. – are not in motion but at rest, i.e. that they always remain what they are. Having arrived at this conclusion, which Cratylus refuses to accept, the basic question is no longer about the epistemological value of words. It is now about the ontology allowing for a theory of knowledge. Can there be knowledge at all on the Heraclitean assumption of the flux of things? Must we not rather assume, for the sake of knowledge, that things in themselves are at rest?

2 Trans. after Ademollo, *Commentary*, 438.

This is a question which is given great prominence in other, presumably later,[3] dialogues such as the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. The *Theaetetus* contains an in-depth discussion of a flux ontology and its consequences for epistemology. It offers a broader but also a much more fine-grained picture of such an ontology than what we have learnt about it from the *Cratylus*. The points of contact, however, are of interest. The *Cratylus* attributes the view that everything is in flux to the "Heracliteans and many others" (440c2). The *Theaetetus* is more specific in attributing it to "all the wise men (*sophoi*) except Parmenides," more particularly to Protagoras, Heraclitus and Empedocles, and tracing it back to the founders of comic and tragic poetry, that is Epicharmus and Homer respectively (152e). Homer is presented as the commander-in-chief of this whole army (153a) and Protagoras as the most prominent theorist of this crowd (152a ff.). The secret of his theory consists in the claim that there does not exist a single thing itself in itself because everything is in a process of becoming (*aei gignetai*) instead of a state of being (*esti*, 152d–e). A deeper analysis of becoming, attributed to the more refined among the adherents of a flux theory, based on the principle that everything is motion and nothing else (156a), analyses motion into two concomitant powers, a power to act (*dynamis poiein*) and a power to be acted upon (*dynamis paschein*), so that nothing can be one thing in itself, but everything always results from the interaction of these two powers, neither of which allows the other to stop changing (156a–157c).[4] Since this account applies also to sense-perception and all kinds of judgement, cognitive acts are always changing processes, too, with no criterion available which would make it possible to differentiate between them in terms of truth and falsehood (157d–162a). The more elaborate picture of the ontology of flux in the *Theaetetus* thus serves a purpose similar to the rougher, if by no means less playfully presented, version of it in the *Cratylus*: the ontology of flux does not offer a firm ground for knowledge that distinguishes between truth and falsehood.

In the *Sophist*, an explicit sequel to the *Theaetetus*, the same theory of flux resurfaces. A class of refined flux-ontologists appears on stage – or rather the Eleatic Stranger imagines that there might be such a kind of reformed corporealists (246d) – who hold that being consists in nothing else than the capacity (*dynamis*) to act (*poiein*) and to be acted upon (*pathein*). The former is the

3 On questions concerning the relative chronology of the *Cratylus* see Michael Erler, *Die Philosophie der Antike, Band 2/2*: *Platon* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2007), 109 f.

4 See Štěpán Špinka, "Nothing Is in Itself One (Motion, Relation and Corporeality in the Context of Protagoras' 'Secret Doctrine' in the *Theaetetus*)," *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik* 10 (2011): 241–269.

power to make another thing different, the latter is an aptitude of something weaker to suffer from something more powerful (247d–e). These reformed corporealists – or "dynamists" as we may call them – are contrasted with the friends of Forms who distinguish between being (*ousia*) and becoming (*genesis*) and hold that intelligible and incorporeal Forms alone constitute true being, whereas bodies are nothing but a flux of becoming (246b–c). These two ontologies, the dynamist and the idealist, as presented by the Eleatic Stranger, have in common the theory of flux conceived of as an interaction between conjoined capacities of acting and being acted upon. Yet whereas the dynamists take such an interaction to be the only being there is, the idealists relegate it to the realm of becoming, which is opposed to that of true being from which the capacities to act and to be acted upon are banished (248c). Both theories are tested for their capacity to account for knowledge and both fail this test. The friends of Forms are the first to be brought on trial (248d–249b). If they hold that our body is in communion (*koinonei*) with becoming by means of sense-perception, whereas our soul is in communion (*koinonei*) with true being by means of reasoning, and if they concede that, in both cases, to be in communion or communicate (*koinonein*) consists in acting and being acted upon, they will be forced to acknowledge that the act of knowing (*gignoskein*), by which the soul is in communion with true being, is acting (*poiein*) and that, correspondingly, in being known (*gignoskesthai*), true being is acted upon and thus subject to motion. Since this would be in contradiction with the theory of being the idealists profess, they will prefer to reject altogether this kind of relationship as an explanatory pattern for knowledge. But in so doing – so at least the Eleatic Stranger puts it – they will withhold, together with motion, also life, soul and thinking (*phronesis*) or intellection (*nous*) from true being. There will be an unmoved being at rest (*on … akinēton hestos*), in splendid isolation as it were, but there will be no intellection (*nous*) of anything whatsoever by anyone whomever, if intellection occurs in the soul and the soul moves and lives. On the other hand, and this is the verdict on the dynamists (249b–c), if we allow that everything is moved and changed (*pheromena kai kinoumena panta einai*), we will deprive the realm of being of the very character of identity (*tauton touto*, *to kata tauta kai hosautos kai peri to auto*) which – so at least the Eleatic Stranger suggests – seems to suppose that there is rest. The problem is that where there is no identity there is no intellection. This is why such a theory must be fought by all rational means, the Eleatic Stranger says, since it would make all knowledge, thought and intellection vanish (249c).

As in the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*, we also learn in the *Sophist* that the ontology of flux is no good basis for epistemology. But unlike the accounts of the former dialogues, and more disturbingly, the discussion in the *Sophist* seems

to suggest that the dream Socrates spoke about at the end of the *Cratylus* – the dream about the beautiful itself, the good itself and each one of *ta onta* (439c–d) – may not be a viable alternative either. In this respect, the *aporia* in which the *gigantomachia* of the central part of the *Sophist* results resembles the *aporiai* in which the old Parmenides, in the eponymous dialogue, involves the young Socrates. The latter too, like Socrates in the *Cratylus* and the friends of Forms in the *Sophist*, puts forward a very elementary theory of Forms (*Parm.* 128e–129e) which posits their existence, each one in itself, without specifying the nature of the relationship that exists between them and sensible objects, without asking whether there are relations among the Forms themselves and without raising the question of the relation between the soul and the Forms. In the *Parmenides*, the character Parmenides does raise these questions (130a–135b) but gives no satisfactory answer to them. Instead he engages in a dialectical performance (135b–166c) the epistemic value of which is as ambiguous as that of Socrates' etymological performance in the *Cratylus*. Each performance seems to constitute a deliberate concoction of science and trickery, of truth and falsehood.

In contrast to this, in the *Sophist* the Eleatic Stranger offers a way out of the perplexity concerning the fact that knowledge appears impossible both on the assumption that everything is in motion and on the assumption that being is at rest. The solution, to put it briefly, consists in the thesis that there are different kinds of relationships between the Forms themselves and that these relations allow for bridging the gap between being and becoming. They do so in so far as they allow for the being of things other than being itself, i.e. for participation in being, so that not only Forms other than the Form of being, but also things or phenomena other than intelligible Forms participate in being. The Forms of being, identity and difference, by participating mutually in each other, play a major role in the distribution of being among everything other than the Form of being itself. Motion and rest, on the other hand, being genuine opposites one to another, do not accede to this lofty all-pervasive status so that neither of them can claim to constitute a fundamental characteristic of being. On this account, not only must the ontology of flux be dismissed, but so too must an ontology that divides the whole of reality between rest and motion as two opposites. Rather, motion and rest have to be re-evaluated in their respective roles within the structured whole dominated by the Forms of being, identity and difference.[5]

5 See Filip Karfík, "*Pantelôs on* and *megista genê* (Plato, *Soph.* 242c–259b)," in *Plato's* Sophist: *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, ed. Aleš Havlíček, Filip Karfík (Praha: Oikúmené, 2011), 120–145.

This structured ontology, as we may call it,[6] provides a new basis for a theory of language which will differ from the attempted theory of the correctness of names in the *Cratylus*. There are two main points that differentiate the one from the other. The first consists in the fact that the *Sophist* does not focus on the name (*onoma*), but on the sentence (*logos*) whose basic elements are the name (*onoma*), in the function of the grammatical subject, and the verb (*rhema*), in the function of the grammatical predicate: the *rhema* indicates an action, the *onoma* signifies the agent (262a–c).[7] The simplest combination (*symploke*) of *onoma* and *rhēma* in this sense is "so to say the first and smallest of utterances" (σχεδὸν τῶν λόγων πρῶτός τε καὶ σμικρότατος, 262c6–7). Not every combination of words is a meaningful utterance (*logos*), only a sentence gives rise to such speech. But even among meaningful utterances, not every combination of *onoma* and *rhema* is right. Sentences – and compounds of them – have a specific quality. They are true or false with respect to the things they refer to. They are true if they say (*legein*) about the things that are that they are (τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν) and they are false if they say about the things that are not that they are (τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα, 262e–d).[8] The important idea is that the truth or falsehood of a *logos* results from a right or wrong combination of elements suited to form it, the smallest elements of such a kind being the grammatical subject (*onoma*) and predicate (*rhema*) and the smallest combination of them being the sentence (*logos*). This implies that words outside sentences are neither true nor false. This implication is, of course, fatal for Cratylus' view on the correctness of names, as well as for the kind of etymologies Socrates produces in the *Cratylus*.

The second point of difference, as against the *Cratylus,* concerns the mimetic function of language. Cratylus' claim is that names (*onomata*) imitate things (*pragmata*). An *onoma* is a *mimema* or *eikon* of a thing (423a–e, 430a–431d,

6 See Štěpán Špinka, "Das Sein des Nicht-Seins. Einige Thesen zur strukturellen Ontologie im Dialog *Sophistes*," in *Plato's* Sophist: *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, ed. Aleš Havlíček, Filip Karfík (Praha: Oikúmené, 2011), 221–239.

7 See Frédérique Ildefonse, "Quelques différences entre le *Cratyle* et le *Sophiste*," in this volume.

8 See *Crat.* 385b where Socrates gives a definition of true and false speech (λόγος ἀληθής, λόγος ψευδής) in terms of "the one which says about the things that are that they are" and "the one which says about them that they are not" (ὃς ἂν τὰ ὄντα λέγῃ ὡς ἔστιν, ἀληθής· ὃς δ' ἂν ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ψευδής) and 429d where Cratylus gives a definition of a false speech (τὸ ψευδῆ λέγειν) in terms of "not saying the things that are" (τὸ μὴ τὰ ὄντα λέγειν). On the theory of true and false speech discussed in *Cratylus*, however, it does not matter whether the spoken unit is a name (*onoma*), a verb (*rhema*), a sentence (*logos*) as a combination (*synthesis*) of a name and a verb, a syllable (*syllabe*), a letter (*gramma*) or an element (*stoicheion*), i.e. a phoneme, see *Crat.* 431a–434b.

439a–b). Cratylus does not expand himself on this claim. It is Socrates who lends the view a conceptual garb by introducing the idea of a legislator who established the names in "reproducing the form of name suitable for each given thing in whatever syllables" (τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος εἶδος ἀποδιδῷ τὸ προσῆκον ἑκάστῳ ἐν ὁποιαισοῦν συλλαβαῖς, 390a5–6) or, to put it more simply, in "imitating, by means of syllables and letters, the essence of things" (ὁ διὰ τῶν συλλαβῶν τε καὶ γραμμάτων τὴν οὐσίαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἀπομιμούμενος, 431d2–3). At the end of the dialogue, Socrates suggests that the things thus imitated are items such as the beautiful itself or the good itself, which are always such as they are (439c–d), i.e. intelligible Forms. Cratylus, however, sticks to the Heraclitean view of reality (440c–e). This suggests that, for him, the things imitated by names are objects of sense-perception. But, notwithstanding this difference, both Socrates and Cratylus suppose a relationship of resemblance between names and things. Neither Socrates' idea of a kind of expert knowledge supervising the fabrication of names (390b–e) nor Cratylus' acknowledgement of the role of habit (*ethos*), i.e. convention (*syntheke*), in understanding (*gignoskein*) what another person has in mind (*dianoeisthai*) when he or she utters his or her thought[9] (434e–435c) affect the core idea of Cratylus' naturalist position, according to which there is a direct relation of resemblance between name and thing (ὄνομα ὅμοιον τῷ πράγματι, 434a). A name manifests (*deloun*) a thing by virtue of a resemblance (*homoioma*) between them (τὸ ὄνομα δήλωμα τοῦ πράγματος, 433d; ὁμοιώματι δηλοῦν ὅτι ἄν τις δηλοῖ, 434a). Cratylus even claims that knowledge of names is the only way of knowing things (435d–436a). Socrates casts doubts on this view in pointing out that there must have been a source of knowledge prior to the imposition of names and that there must be a criterion of the correctness of names that is independent of them (438a–439b). But no relation of resemblance other than that between names, their constituents and compounds, on the one hand, and things imitated by them, on the other, is discussed. Here lies the second point of difference between the *Cratylus*, on the one hand, and the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, on the other. In the *Theaetetus*, *logos* is conceived of as an imitation not of things, but of thought. *Logos* is "like an image of thought in the voice" (διανοίας ἐν φωνῇ ὥσπερ εἴδωλον, *Tht.* 208c5). The first of the three definitions listed in the passage dealing with the meaning of the term *logos* runs as follows:

9 On this topic, see the contribution of Francesco Aronadio, "Intentionality and referentiality in Plato's Cratylus," in this volume.

> to make one's own thinking (*dianoia*) apparent through the voice accompanied by verbs and nouns, by imprinting the judgment (*doxa*) into the flux which goes through the mouth like into a mirror or water. (*Tht.* 206d1–4)[10]

Speech (*logos, legein*), Socrates tells us in an earlier passage of the *Theaetetus*, is a judgement (*doxa, doxazein*) passed by a thinking soul (*psyche … dianooumene*) if it is uttered by the means of voice (*phone*, 189e–190a). The same conception of the *logos* as utterance of thought is endorsed by the Stranger from Elea in the *Sophist*:

> STRANGER: Aren't *dianoia* and *logos* the same except that the *dialogos* of the soul with herself occurring without voice was given the name *dianoia* by us?
> THEAETETUS: Quite so.
> STRANGER: And, originating from it, the flux which goes through the mouth accompanied by sound, don't we call it *logos*?
> THEAETETUS: True, we do.
> (*Soph.* 263e3–9)[11]

According to this theory, *logos,* as a combination of nouns and verbs, has a mimetic nature, but what it imitates are not directly the things (*pragmata*), as Cratylus' naturalist theory has it, but thinking (*dianoia*) or judgment (*doxa*), the latter being nothing other than a completed act of thinking (*dianoias apotelesma*) which constitutes either an affirmation or a negation and which is either true or false (*Soph.* 263b–264b). The analysis of speech in terms of a combination (*sumploke, plegma*) of components functioning as grammatical subject and predicate[12] must apply to thinking as well, which constitutes such a *plegma* or *symploke* prior to speech. One may ask: If the *logos* is a combination of *onoma* and *rhema*, both of them being words formed by articulated sounds, what are the components combined by *dianoia* and *doxa*? This we are

10 τὴν αὑτοῦ διάνοιαν ἐμφανῆ ποιεῖν διὰ φωνῆς μετὰ ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων, ὥσπερ εἰς κάτοπτρον ἢ ὕδωρ τὴν δόξαν ἐκτυπούμενον εἰς τὴν διὰ τοῦ στόματος ῥοήν.

11 ΞΕ. Οὐκοῦν διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταὐτόν· πλὴν ὁ μὲν ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς αὑτὴν διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς γιγνόμενος τοῦτ᾽ αὐτὸ ἡμῖν ἐπωνομάσθη, διάνοια; – ΘΕΑΙ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν. – ΞΕ. Τὸ δέ γ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνης ῥεῦμα διὰ τοῦ στόματος ἰὸν μετὰ φθόγγου κέκληται λόγος; – ΘΕΑΙ. ᾿Αληθῆ. See. also *Tim.* 37a–b where the cognitive processes of the world soul are described in terms of a λόγος … φερόμενος ἄνευ φθόγγου καὶ ἠχῆς.

12 See *Tht.* 202b, 206d; *Soph.* 261e–262d.

not told. Certainly, the components of thought which are mirrored in speech by *onoma* and *rhema* are not themselves words in the sense of articulated sounds. Nor are they mental representations (*phantasia*) since representation, the Eleatic Stranger says, is a combination of sense-perception and judgement (*symmeixis aistheseos kai doxes*, *Soph.* 264b). One might think that they are the intelligible Forms (*eide* or *gene*) which themselves constitute a *plegma* or *symploke* prior to thinking. After all, does not the Eleatic Stranger say that "*logos* came about through the combination of Forms one with another"?[13] Forms themselves may be what the dialectical science (*dialektike episteme*) knows in so far as it grasps them correctly in their mutual relationships (253b–e),[14] but they will probably not be reducible to the contents of knowledge.[15] Be that as it may, thinking (*dianoia*), judgment (*doxa*) and representation (*phantasia*), no less than speech (*logos*), admit of falsehood (263d–264d, see also 241e). This is what makes them *imitations* of things (*mimemata ton onton*, 264d4). If the *logos* is an image, whether true or false, of *dianoia/doxa*, the latter is likely to be an image, whether true or false, of things (*ta onta*), an image constituted by the combination of certain elements of thought – we may call them concepts, but Plato does not – which imitate the Forms and are themselves imitated by *onomata kai rhemata*. Thus in the last resort, the *logos* does imitate *ta onta*, but it does so through the intermediary of *dianoia/doxa*, so that, to put it more accurately, speech is an image of an image of *ta onta*.

We are not given more details about the way in which *dianoia/doxa* relates to *ta onta* and *logos* to *dianoia/doxa*. In particular, we are not told what exactly the imitation of *ta onta* by *dianoia/doxa* and of the latter by speech consists in. Nor are we told how exactly the *logos* relates to the *phantasia* as a combination of *doxa* and *aisthesis*, and more precisely how this very combination comes about. To know this is important in order to understand how *logos* relates not only to the objects of thought, but also to the objects of sense-perception.[16] But, from the discussion in the *Sophist,* there emerges what I would like to call, for the sake of convenience, the principle of structural analogy. Let me

13 διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν, 259e.

14 This would correspond to what the *Timaeus*, in the case of the world soul, terms intellection and science νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε (37c).

15 See *Epist.* VII, 342a–e, especially c4–d3.

16 An answer to this question is the theory of the combination of two circular motions within the structure of the soul in the *Timaeus* 37a–c and 43c–44c. One of them relates to the sensibles and produces *doxai* and *pisteis*, the other relates to the intelligibles and produces *nous* and *episteme*. Together they constitute the soundless *logos* of the soul. While in the case of the world soul it is always true (37b4), in the case of human beings it allows for falsehood (44a3).

formulate this principle as follows: If the Forms that constitute being in its complexity (the *symploke ton eidon*) are terms in a network of combinatory relationships, as the Eleatic Stranger's structured ontology has it (259a–b), so are the corresponding components of *dianoia/doxa* (concepts in the soul) and so are the correspondent components of *logos* (*onomata kai rhemata* uttered by voice). If nothing else, at least this structural analogy provides the mimetic link between the three strata of being, thinking and speaking, the first of which is paradigmatic for the subsequent two. Even the composition of words made of vowels and consonants – though no word in itself is either true or false – repeats this pattern, since the connection of vowels with consonants to form syllables is not arbitrary, but governed by combinatory rules (253a). The formal analogy between the network of interrelated terms at the level of *logos* with the one at the level of *dianoia* and, again, the one at the level of *eide* is a version of the mimetic principle which lies at the heart of Cratylus' naturalist theory. In this formalised version, transferred from the *onoma* to the *logos* as the minimal unit which can be true or false, the mimetic principle is to some extent even compatible with the conventionalist theory. The basic elements of speech (*grammata*, *stoicheia*) and the rules governing their combinations may, in fact, be a matter of social convention. The fact that different societies use different languages with different sets of such elements and different rules for their combination testifies to this fact. But the capacity of these languages to produce statements, i.e. affirmations and negations, which are either true or false, does not stem from convention. It is based on the mimetic principle which applies, first, to the relation between thinking and being and, second, to the relation between speaking and thinking.[17] Since the object of thought is itself constituted by definite relations between definite items (Forms), thinking assimilates them by putting analogous items (concepts) in analogous

17 See Aristotle's account of language at the beginning of *De interpretatione*: "First we must settle what a name (*onoma*) is and what a verb (*rhema*) is, and then what a negation (*apophasis*), an affirmation (*kataphasis*), a statement (*apophansis*) and a sentence (*logos*) are. Now spoken sounds (*ta en te phone*) are symbols of affections (*pathemata*) in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken words. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of – affections of the soul – are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses (*homoiomata*) of – actual things (*pragmata*) – are also the same." (*Int.* 1, 16a1–8, trans. John Lloyd Ackrill, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, The revised Oxford translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995^6). Aristotle adopts the conventionalist view of the relation between the language (both written and spoken) and the soul's affections but employs the mimetic principle to explain the relationship between the soul's affections and the things themselves.

relations and speaking imitates thinking in producing again analogous relations between analogous items (words). It is through their analogous structures that speech imitates thought and thought imitates the combination of Forms.

In comparison with the *Cratylus*, the theory of language put forward in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* marks a double shift: from *onoma* to *logos* and from the relation *onoma–pragma* to the relation *logos–dianoia–eide*. The alternative between an ontology of flux and an ontology of unchanging Forms which underlies the debate about the correctness of names in the *Cratylus* resurfaces with vehemence in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. The *Sophist* tries to resolve this conflict by assigning motion and rest their proper places among the greatest genera, thus replacing the primitive ontology of single Forms with a structured ontology of relationships among them. Most importantly, this ontology provides a basis for the theory of falsehood of judgement and speech and, more generally, for the theory of imitation in which, unlike in Cratylus' view, imitation can be true or false. On this new basis, the conception of speech as a kind of *mimesis* can be reformulated. Since speaking and judging consist in a kind of imitation and since imitation, as such, allows for falsehood, neither speech nor judgement can be the criterion of truth. Only what is not itself an imitation can provide this criterion.

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